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Stagnating or flourishing? How Entrepreneurial Support Organizations navigate constraints in nascent ecosystems

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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurial Support Organizations (hereafter ESOs) play an important role in nascent entrepreneurial ecosystems (hereafter EEs) through enabling productive and sustainable entrepreneurship. However, in such ecosystems ESOs may struggle to access the resources they need to activate their support. Drawing upon inductive qualitative research with 31 ESOs and 40 interviews in Uganda, we examine how ESOs navigate challenges of resource-constraints in nascent EEs. A conceptual model is developed, depicting: (1) key challenges ESOs face in resource-constrained nascent EEs, (2) the practices they enact to navigate such challenges, and (3) the implications of these practices at the meso-level of the ‘entrepreneurial support ecosystem’. We find that some ESOs use *adaptation* practices to navigate challenges in nascent EEs, whilst others deploy more agentic *collaboration* and *transformation* practices. We describe the latter as ‘*ecosystem work*’ defined as efforts to create, maintain, and disrupt entrepreneurial support ecosystems. Finally, our model depicts how different navigating practices may influence entrepreneurial support dynamics. We suggest that whilst adaptation alone may result in *stagnating entrepreneurial support ecosystems* that ‘ecosystem work’ may engender *flourishing entrepreneurial support ecosystems*. We contribute to research on nascent EEs and ESOs and offer practical implications.

Keywords: entrepreneurial support organizations; nascent entrepreneurial ecosystems; resource constraints; entrepreneurial support ecosystems; Uganda.

PLAIN ENGLISH SUMMARY

ESOs are widely regarded as important actors in entrepreneurial ecosystems with a key role in the promotion of entrepreneurship-led development across regions. Yet, in resource-constrained nascent EEs, their practices may variably influence ecosystem support dynamics. This study examines ESOs within nascent EEs, focusing on Uganda. Despite increasing attention on EEs in research, policy, and practice, gaps in our understanding remain, including about the role and impacts of ESOs e.g. incubators and accelerators, in the entrepreneurial support ecosystem, especially in developing economies. Drawing upon extensive qualitative research we develop a new conceptual model of the challenges ESOs face in nascent ecosystems and their navigating practices. We reveal how ESOs adopt different approaches, either adapting to contextual challenges or engaging in collaboration and transformation ‘ecosystem work’, and how these generate stagnating or flourishing entrepreneurial support dynamics. We offer conceptual contributions and practical implications for ESOs in nascent EEs, identifying threats, best practices, and variegated impacts.

JEL classifications: L26; L29.

INTRODUCTION

Academics, practitioners, and policy makers are increasingly interested in entrepreneurial ecosystems, with it suggested that supportive ecosystems can enable more productive (Stam & Van de Ven, 2021; Theodoraki et al., 2022; Volkmann et al., 2021), and sustainable entrepreneurship (Sottini et al., 2022; Theodoraki et al., 2018). Entrepreneurial ecosystems (hereafter EEs) have been defined as “a set of interdependent actors and factors coordinated in such a way that they enable productive entrepreneurship within a particular territory” (Stam & Spigel, 2016, p. 1) and constitute “organized attempts to establish environments that are conducive to increasing the success for newly established ventures” (Audretsch et al., 2019, p. 313). In this regard, the literature has identified a leading role for Entrepreneurial Support Organizations (ESOs), such as incubators, science and technology parks, accelerators, co-working spaces etc., in creating and evolving entrepreneurial ecosystems to enable start-ups and small organizations to flourish (van Rijnsoever, 2022; Audretsch et al., 2020). ESOs are a particular type of organization within EEs with a common purpose of supporting individuals and collectives, with (in)direct and (im)material assistance, through stages of the entrepreneurial process (Bergman & McMullen, 2022).

ESOs aim to catalyze entrepreneurship in EEs, to connect ventures to external actors and environments, and to facilitate resource flows within and across different EE levels (Volkmann et al., 2021). Theodoraki and Messeghem (2017) theorize EEs as a multi-level construct, highlighting ESOs as important players in the ‘*entrepreneurial support ecosystem*’, a sub-ecosystem at the meso-level of analysis “characterized by a variety of socio-economic and interdependent actors sharing (...) the same goal of business entrepreneurial support” (p. 58). Extant literature identifies the importance of studying ESOs to better understand sub-ecosystem dynamics and their relationship with EEs overall (Messeghem et al., 2023; Theodoraki & Catanzaro, 2022).

To date, however, EEs literature has mainly focused on well-established ecosystems, often in developed economies, where ESOs have greater access to resources and infrastructure to deliver entrepreneurial support, thus assuming that ESOs are generally enabled in their functioning (Volkmann et al., 2021; Thompson et al., 2018). This may not be the case for ESOs in nascent ecosystems, often characterized by resource constraints (Spigel & Harrison, 2018; Roundy & Bayer, 2019), thus some assumptions about ESOs’ capabilities may need to be reconsidered. In this regard, whilst some work now examines the role and outcomes of ESOs in nascent ecosystems (Littlewood & Kiyumbu, 2018; Diamantopoulou et al., 2018; Guéneau et al., 2022; Harima et al., 2024), this remains limited and there is little knowledge of ESOs’ actual contributions to venture creation, survival, and success (Hannah & Eisenhardt, 2018; Leger et al., 2024), as well as how ESOs navigate the manifold challenges of nascent EEs (Bergman & McMullen, 2022). This is

especially the case for nascent EE in emerging and developing economies (Cao & Shi, 2021), and raises questions of how ESOs in such economies ‘workaround’ severe contextual challenges in nascent ecosystems, navigating institutional voids (Sydow et al., 2022), weak network problems, and particularly for this research resource constraints, to enable productive entrepreneurship and local ecosystem development (van Rijnsoever, 2020; Theodoraki et al., 2022). To address these problems in the literature, and responding to recent calls for more research on support organizing at the meso-level of EEs (Theodoraki & Messeghem, 2017; Bergman & McMullen, 2022), we pose the research question: *how do ESOs navigate challenges in resource-constrained nascent ecosystems to deliver entrepreneurial support?*

To answer this research question, inductive in-depth case study research was conducted (Gehman et al., 2018) in the nascent ecosystem of Uganda, focusing at the meso-level of analysis (Theodoraki & Messeghem, 2017) with data collected from 31 ESOs and 40 interviews undertaken. Data was analyzed using the rigorous Gioia et al. (2013) methodology. Studying ESOs at the meso-level is important, but is also significant for understanding wider EE dynamics, development, and resource flows (Spigel & Harrison, 2018; Roundy & Bayer, 2019).

Due to the exploratory nature of our research question and its focus on ESOs in nascent resource-constrained ecosystems, we directed our analysis to the ‘extreme setting’ (Eisenhardt, 2021) of Uganda, examining in-depth its sub-level ‘*entrepreneurial support ecosystem*’. The Uganda context is particularly suitable for this research, because of the country’s substantial entrepreneurial opportunities (African Development Bank, 2023) and active start-up scene (UNCDF, 2023), juxtaposed with significant physical challenges, institutional voids, and wider resource-constraints that limit entrepreneurial venturing (George et al., 2016; Busch & Barkema, 2022; Sottini et al., 2022). These constraints are well illustrated by Uganda’s 116th position in the World Bank’s Ease of Doing Business Ranking (World Bank, 2023).

Our results underpin the development of a theoretical model depicting (1) *the challenges ESOs face in resource-constrained ecosystems*, which lead them to adopt different (2) *navigating practices*. We reveal how some ESOs workaround contextual resource challenges through *adaptation* while others engage in more agentic *collaboration* and *transformation* practices. Finally, we show how these different ESO navigating practices may impact the (3) *development of the ‘entrepreneurial support ecosystem’*. We suggest that *adaptation* may be associated with a *stagnating entrepreneurial support ecosystem*, whilst *collaboration* and *transformation* may engender a *flourishing entrepreneurial support ecosystem* for ESOs, start-ups, and local communities.

This paper contributes to the EE literature in several respects. We shed light on the challenges faced by ESOs operating in nascent resource-constrained EEs. We reveal empirically and offer a new

conceptualization of the practices adopted by ESOs to navigate these contextual challenges, leading to a novel theorizing of ‘ecosystem work’ as an agentic approach adopted by ESOs to navigate resource-constraints and deliver entrepreneurial support. We propose a definition of *ecosystem work* as efforts to create, maintain, and disrupt an entrepreneurial support ecosystem in the face of constraints. We further unveil the positive effects of such ecosystem work on the development of the entrepreneurial support ecosystem in Uganda, at the meso-level of analysis (Theodoraki & Catanzaro, 2022; Messeghem et al., 2023).

Our study also contributes to ecosystem development literature, through identifying two processes by which ESOs may influence the development of the entrepreneurial support ecosystem. We show how particular ESO practices may lead to a stagnating entrepreneurial support ecosystem, where contextual resource challenges are maintained and even intensify. In contrast, other ESO practices may support the development of a flourishing entrepreneurial support ecosystem, the relaxing of contextual challenges, and the provision of more effective startup support. We reveal each mechanism, showing their implications for theory and practice.

The paper proceeds as follows. In the next two sections we present the theoretical background. We then detail the research methodology. Afterwards, we present our findings and introduce the grounded model, which are then discussed in the context of extant literature. Finally, we further explain our contributions to theory and practice.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Nascent entrepreneurial ecosystems and resource-constraints

Growing work identifies the potential contribution of EEs to fostering productive entrepreneurship (Stam & Van de Ven, 2021; Theodoraki & Messeghem, 2017). Nevertheless, questions remain about how we can build flourishing EEs, where new ventures proliferate, entrepreneurial endeavors are effectively enabled (Isenberg, 2013; Mason & Brown, 2016; Buratti et al., 2023), and positive impacts are engendered for local communities and the environment (Cohen, 2006). In this regard, work has recently stressed the need to build ‘sustainable EEs’ (Theodoraki et al., 2022; Volkmann et al., 2021), understood as flourishing EEs that foster innovative start-ups, economic growth, and venturing to address sustainable development challenges and opportunities (Sottini et al., 2022; Volkmann et al., 2021).

There remains much about EEs that we do not understand. EEs are still a ‘hot topic’ (Cao & Shi, 2021) and ‘buzzword’ in management and entrepreneurship studies (Wurth et al., 2022), with some core definitional questions yet to be settled (Theodoraki, 2020). Spigel and Harrison (2018) identify EEs as a

‘unique domain’ of research, with theoretical roots in different fields including entrepreneurship, economic geography, and regional science. Building on the early definition of Cohen (2006), entrepreneurial ecosystems have been described as “a set of interdependent actors and factors coordinated in such a way that they enable productive entrepreneurship within a particular territory” (Stam & Spigel, 2016, p. 1). Research suggests that EEs can best be understood holistically (Theodoraki, 2020), by exploring actors and factors multiple interactions, and how such interactions may affect the overall functioning and success of EEs (Spigel, 2016). Recently, scholars have further sought to deepen our understanding of why certain entrepreneurial ecosystems are more supportive and successful than others, by exploring different levels of development or resilience (Roundy et al., 2017a).

The development of EEs has been researched deploying an evolutionary lens (Spigel & Harrison, 2018; Thompson et al., 2018). In this perspective, the earliest phase of EE development (Alvedalen & Boschma, 2017; Cavallo et al., 2019) is the so-called ‘birth phase’ (Cantner et al., 2021). This nascent phase of the EE life cycle is examined by Mack and Mayer (2016) and Colombelli et al. (2019) amongst others. It is suggested that in this nascent phase of evolution EEs are characterized by various weaknesses, constraints, and challenges for both ESOs and new ventures. These include difficulties in market access, limited investors and finance, underdeveloped human capital, low levels of entrepreneurial culture etc. (Roundy & Bayer, 2019). According to Spigel and Harrison (2018, p. 162), a nascent EE is typically characterized by “low levels of connectivity between new ventures and other ecosystem actors”, with “little recycling of resources (...) few new resources created internally” and suffering from “leakage of existing resources to other regions”. Low levels of connectivity mean that in nascent EEs the flow of resources between actors is inhibited, both because of general resource constraints, but also because actors are culturally less oriented towards interaction (Spigel & Harrison, 2018).

Building upon resource dependency theory, Roundy and Bayer (2019, p. 551) similarly characterize nascent EEs as “ecosystems in the early stages of cultivating the interrelated forces that promote and sustain entrepreneurship”. They suggest that in nascent EEs, resource scarcity hinders ecosystem development, exacerbating dependency on the outside. Further detailing these resource challenges they suggest that nascent EEs may have limited financial, human, social, cultural, and symbolic capitals. In sum, literature suggests that nascent EEs and actors within them may need to create and/or acquire resources to activate processes to enable the emergence of productive entrepreneurship (Spigel & Harrison, 2018; Cantner et al., 2021).

Entrepreneurial support organizations in resource-constrained contexts

Globally, EEs are home to diverse actors and vibrant initiatives aimed at promoting entrepreneurship (Audretsch et al., 2020; Sottini et al., 2022), this includes in nascent EEs. Practitioners, researchers, and policymakers all attribute a key role in EEs to ESOs of different kinds (Diamantopoulou et al., 2018; Busch & Barkema, 2022; Guéneau et al., 2022). Varied efforts have been made to define a more unified notion of what an ESO is, with extant literature often focusing on particular types of ESOs, from incubators (Hackett et al., 2004) to accelerators (Crişan et al., 2021), and science and technology parks (Hobbs et al., 2017). In their recent literature review, Bergman and McMullen (2022) further conceptualize this phenomenon, and define an ESO as “an organization whose primary purpose is to support individuals and collectives, through (in)direct and (im)material assistance, as they seek to initiate and progress through the stages of the entrepreneurial process” (p. 690). Thus, ESOs are organizations of various kinds within EEs but which share a common purpose of enabling and promoting entrepreneurship.

From a theoretical standpoint, ESOs are key actors in EEs because of their strategic positioning at the meso-level, the so-called ‘entrepreneurial support ecosystem’ (Theodoraki, 2017). Here, they work to foster synergies and facilitate network formation (van Rijnssoever, 2020; Volkmann et al., 2021). Whilst some literature has questioned the effectiveness of ESOs (Colombo & Delmastro, 2002; Amezcua et al., 2013; Hallen et al., 2020), their growing numbers in developed and developing economies, with them often sponsored by powerful actors, makes them an important focus of study and as having a potentially significant role in helping entrepreneurs transform ideas into new ventures (Chandra & Fealey, 2009; Hallen et al., 2020).

In recent years, research has begun to investigate ESOs operating in challenging environments affected by various issues, including resource-constraints. Reviewing work on ESOs in emerging economies, Cao and Shi (2021) synthesize the literature to identify that ESOs in such settings face challenges including limited funding, weak networks, heavy dependence on public subsidies and grants, difficulties in attracting high-quality personnel, and in selecting participants. Other studies have explored the particular work and expertise of different kinds of ESOs. For example, addressing market failures and filling institutional voids (Dutt et al., 2016; Littlewood & Kiyumbu, 2018; Sydow et al., 2022; Mair et al., 2012), facilitating the acquisition of public resources (Armanios et al., 2017), enabling serendipitous and unexpected discoveries (Bush & Barkema, 2022), bolstering ecosystem additionality (Goswami et al., 2018) and adopting different ecosystem orchestration practices (Harima et al., 2024). Generally, research on ESOs, including in emerging and developing economies, has identified that they can provide a repository of resources and

facilitate the development of connections and capabilities to support the formation, survival, and expansion of entrepreneurial ventures (Alvedalen & Boschma, 2017; Thompson et al., 2018; Dattée et al., 2018).

Current knowledge, however, often assumes that ESOs catalyze resources that are present, effective, and already shared within an EE. This may not be the case in nascent ecosystems, where resources may be scarce, institutional challenges abound, and networks are weak, with these problems difficult to overcome (Cao & Shi, 2018; Dattée et al., 2018; van Rijnsoever, 2020 or 2022). Moreover, these challenges may be amplified in emerging economies where entrepreneurial support is most needed, but questions remain about its actual effectiveness (Friederici, 2019; Gonzalez-Urbe & Leatherbee, 2018). Therefore, whilst ESOs should play a crucial role in supporting entrepreneurship efforts (Busch & Barkema, 2022; Guéneau et al., 2022), for instance by reducing new business discontinuance or increasing the risk-taking capacity of vulnerable entrepreneurs (Leger et al., 2024), more research is needed to really understand how ESOs can effectively operate in resource-constrained nascent EEs to promote productive and sustainable entrepreneurship (Roundy & Bayer, 2019; Wurth et al., 2022; Friederici, 2019). This is the objective of this study, which investigates the nascent Uganda EE focusing on the meso-level, the ‘entrepreneurial support ecosystem’.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Case Selection

This research aims to provide insights on how ESOs navigate resource-constrained nascent entrepreneurial EEs to deliver entrepreneurial support. Reflecting our exploratory research question, and the challenging under researched context for this study, an inductive methodology was adopted. A single-case study research design (Yin, 2014) was selected, this case being the nascent Uganda EE and focusing particularly on the entrepreneurial support ecosystem of ESOs (the embedded units) and their work (Theodoraki & Messeghem, 2017). This single case study approach was appropriate for addressing our research question, as it provided the opportunity to gain rich in-depth insights on a nascent EE, and on how interactions and dynamics within that EE influence the work of ESOs.

To select the ESOs, the ‘embedded units’ in our case, we initially adopted a purposive sampling procedure. Our selection criteria were: (1) they are ESOs as per Bergman and McMullen’s (2022) classification of five forms: incubators, science parks, accelerators, makerspaces, and co-working spaces; (2) they have existed for more than 2 years; (3) they target entrepreneurs of different kinds as beneficiaries (ranging from impact-oriented to tech entrepreneurs) and venturing at different stages of development (from early stage idea to growing start-ups); and (4) they undertake varied support programs and activities (from

interventions focused on the circular economy, humanitarian work, consulting, green entrepreneurship, high-tech etc.). Criteria #3 and #4 were included to improve data heterogeneity, and thus enhance reliability. Finally, we considered issues of access and data richness.

The nascent Uganda EE was selected as the case study in this research for several reasons. First, Uganda is a vibrant setting for entrepreneurship research (Kolk & Rivera-Santos, 2018). It is often ranked highly in global entrepreneurship rankings like the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) 2019/2020, which rated Uganda as one of the most entrepreneurial countries in the world and identified that 30% of Ugandans start businesses annually (GCIC, 2023). Similarly, the Global Startup Ecosystem Report 2023 ranks Kampala (Uganda's capital city) as #1 in the top five emerging ecosystems in sub-Saharan Africa (GSER, 2023) – although it still has some way to go to match the 'ecosystem value' of nearby Nairobi, Kenya. Uganda is also a dynamic and relatively fast-growing economy (Africa Economic Outlook, 2023, George et al., 2016; Sottini et al., 2022) creating significant entrepreneurial opportunities. Uganda's government is furthermore working with international partners and actively trying to support entrepreneurship and the country's nascent EE, for instance through developing a new National Entrepreneurship Strategy Framework (UNCTAD, 2022).

We recognize the above presents a somewhat partial picture i.e., many of Uganda's entrepreneurs operate at the micro-level of necessity entrepreneurship, with limited agency, low levels of technological sophistication, and few growth prospects (Dencker et al., 2021). Nevertheless, there is an emerging generation of fast-growing startups in the Ugandan EE, raising millions in capital, contributing to job creation, and tackling societal challenges (Startuplist.africa, 2024). Illustrating this point, dynamic entrepreneurial startups can be found in different sectors of Uganda's economy, including agriculture (e.g., EzyAgric, Grainpulse), transportation (e.g., Tugende, SafeBoda), financial services (e.g., Asaak, Beyonic), healthcare (e.g., M-Scan, ClinicPesa Ltd) etc. Some of these are also noted 'champions' in local EE support programs. For instance, Tugende (founded in 2013) supports access to loans, motorcycles, and facilities for informal riders using digital solutions. It also employs more than 800 people full-time across Uganda and Kenya and has raised millions of US dollars in investment including from venture capitalists (Gotugende.com, 2022; TechCrunch.com, 2022). Reports from commentators and African practitioner organizations add weight to these examples and position Uganda as a promising entrepreneurial region – for instance in the 2021 Partech Africa Report, the Ugandan EE ranked 12th and collected \$19 million in Tech-VC Equity Funding (Partechpartners.com, 2021). Similarly, in the GEI Index 2019 (last available) Uganda was awarded an 'Opportunity startups' pillar score of 0.331, which whilst still at a level typical of low-income countries is higher than the 0.236 of neighboring much lauded Kenya (GEDI, 2019). In sum,

we think there is ample evidence in Uganda of the type of productive and sustainable entrepreneurship identified and emphasized in the EE literature.

The broadly positive outlook presented above is, however, also counterpoised by the fact that Uganda still faces significant sustainable development challenges – as illustrated by its ranking of 166th in the United Nations Human Development Report (UN, 2023). ESOs across Uganda, and the ventures they support, must navigate social issues like poverty, hunger, illiteracy, gender-based violence, low levels of energy access etc. whilst also overcoming problems of underdeveloped physical infrastructures, limited institutional support, the presence of ‘institutional voids’, a relatively constrained funding environment etc. (Sydow et al., 2022; Busch & Barkema, 2022). These challenges are reflected in Uganda’s position of 116th in the World Bank’s Ease of Doing Business Rank (World Bank, 2023) and 115th in the World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Report 2019 (WEF, 2019).

To conclude, we think the juxtaposition of dynamic entrepreneurial activity and a plethora of ESOs undertaking activities targeting different entrepreneurs/start-ups, alongside significant social need, institutional challenges, and resource constraints, makes the nascent Ugandan EE an ideal setting for our research. It allows us to answer our research question, engage in novel theory development, and deliver new empirical insights, contributing to EE literature.

Data Collection

Work began in January 2022, with the analysis of reports and secondary materials from local and international organizations (e.g., International Trade Center, the World Bank, Growth Africa etc.). Preliminary conversations were also held with individuals and organizations working in the field to identify possible ESOs to study. From this work we developed a list of 48 ESOs operating in Uganda, that fit our selection criteria and could be researched. This sample included varied ESOs differentiated by factors like owner (e.g., public, university based, private), funding (e.g., funding models, principal sources of funding – domestic or international), mission/orientation (e.g., social impact development, tech industry, design, agribusiness activities).

In March-April 2022 we began contacting ESOs to validate our sample and determine their willingness to participate in the research. There were then two main phases of data collection. The first phase occurred from July to August 2022. Data was collected from 27 ESOs, including 31 semi-structured interviews with key informants, predominantly in the capital city of Kampala. As we conducted these interviews, we further verified our ESO list together with informants, thus confirming the most relevant actors for our study through peer-to-peer evaluation. Two members of the research team were directly involved in data

collection, taking recordings, making field notes, and meeting regularly to discuss emerging theoretical insights which directed further data collection with specific ESOs, with the goal of reaching theoretical saturation. In this way we shifted from purposive to a more theoretical sampling procedure as the research progressed, and as discussed in extant literature (Conlon et al., 2020; Glaser et al., 1968).

Further analysis occurred after this first round of data collection. Based on this analysis we conducted a second round of interviews, which took place in September and October 2022 via conference calls. This second phase included four follow-up interviews, and five new interviews (9 in total) with representatives of 4 additional ESOs to validate and share initial findings. Our rigorous analysis continued, including the assessment of additional materials like fieldwork photos, online content, and reports from ESOs to triangulate secondary data with the primary interviews data (Gehman et al., 2018).

Our interview protocol included ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions related to the history of the ESO, its development, key challenges faced, its business model, and practices adopted to navigate challenges in the EE. Questions were also asked relating to perceptions of the EE, its potential, and prospects for entrepreneurial support. Reflecting the qualitative exploratory nature of this research, iteration occurred throughout data collection and analysis, for instance between data, emerging concepts, and the literature – see further details below. Table 1 summarizes the multiple sources of data used in this research, while in Table 2 we offer an overview of the different ESOs studied.

Table 1. Data sources

<i>Data Source</i>	<i>Type of data</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Use in the Analysis</i>
A. Public documents	Report from NGOs, Government, Institutions	282 pages	Familiarize with the cultural context and the local Entrepreneurial Ecosystem.
B. Interviews	Semi-structured interviews	Total sample: #31 ESOs #40 interviews, 45h and 56m First phase: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> #27 field visits #31 interviews on field Second phase: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> #5 online interviews #4 online follow-up interviews 	Reconstruction of the set of concepts produced in the data tables.
C. Additional data from ESOs	Report and Articles Pictures and media Website materials	260 pages 98 pictures 48 websites	Support, integrate and triangulated evidence from interviews.

Table 2. Interviews table

#	Organization	Description	Main activities	Job role	N° Int.	Duration
1	ESO#1	Incubation services in a collaborative co-working space for young and growing tech-entrepreneurs.	Thematic labs (i.e., education, finance, health, agriculture); acceleration.	GM; Community manager	2	2h24m [in field]
2	ESO#2	University based incubator, providing consultancy and acceleration.	Seed/early stage investing; investor connection; entrepreneurship clubs; networking and pitch events.	Co-founder	1	1h29m [in field]
3	ESO#3	Public-private incubator supporting government in developing a new generation of dynamic Ugandan entrepreneurs.	Events; BDS; seed capital.	Director of R&D	1	1h10m [in field]
4	ESO#4	Not-profit incubator and accelerator promoting renewable-energy businesses in Uganda. <i>Mission</i> : “To build sustainable renewable energy businesses that transform lives.”	Incubation and acceleration; BDS; piloting renewable energy technologies.	GM	1	1h40m [in field]
5	ESO#5	Agribusiness incubator established by Makerere University and NUCAFE Coffee cooperative.	Incubation, facilities access.	CEO	1	59m [in field]
6	ESO#6	University Incubator and Accelerator for young entrepreneurs.	Collaboration space; business and product development; coaching; market and capital access.	GM	1	1h2m [in field]
7	ESO#7	Consultancy firm focused on growing ‘good businesses’ with social return in agriculture, healthcare, education, energy.	Consultancy services; trainings; expert mentoring.	Business development manager	1	1h24m [in field]
8	ESO#8	Social business accelerator focused on social enterprises, with the primary principle of operating at the triple bottom line.	Practical skills training; acceleration; social media exposure; investment facilitation.	CEO; COO	3	2h2m [in field #2] 1h10m [online #1]
9	ESO#9	Innovation center and advisory firm, focused on support of entrepreneurs that address climate change and create social impact.	Project consulting; BDS; investments services.	CEO	1	1h19m [on field]
10	ESO#10	Innovation hub focused on humanitarian response in emerging countries.	Social impact programs; project development; piloting; investors matching.	COO	1	1h56m [in field]
11	ESO#11	Social impact fund with support programs. <i>Mission</i> : “We finance and support sustainable social businesses that provide income and essential products and services to the poorest communities across Uganda.”	debt or equity for social businesses; BDS.	CEO; Portfolio Manager; Loan specialist	3	1h44m [in field #2] 1h2m [online #1]
12	ESO#12	Incubator and accelerator focused on tech companies.	Prototyping; post-incubation support; mentoring.	Country Manager	1	41m [in field]
13	ESO#13	Innovation hub focused on young tech-driven entrepreneurs, founded by Google.	Co-working; incubation; technical support; funds and market access.	CEO	1	1h13m [in field]

#	Organization	Description	Main activities	Job role	N° Int.	Duration
14	ESO#14	Private co-working space, with incubation and trainings programs.	Incubation; trainings; consultancy; mentorship; co-working.	CEO	1	1h34m [in field]
15	ESO#15	Manufacturing innovation hub for creatives. <i>Mission:</i> “Curating a launchpad for creatives by making available tools, access to market, and capital necessary to grow.”	Incubation; co-working; manufacturing facilities; market access platform.	CEO	1	1h10m [in field]
16	ESO#16	Incubator and co-working space for creatives, designers, and tech start-ups. <i>Mission:</i> “to show the economic value of creativity and ‘design thinking’ and provide an entry point for international market opportunities.”	Incubation; networking; office renting; IT infrastructure.	Co-founder and CEO	1	1h20m [in field]
17	ESO#17	Advisory and investment firm with support programs to local SMEs.	Investment advisory; seed/venture capital; digital platform for investments.	CFO; Loan Manager	2	37m [in field #1] 1h5m [online #1]
18	ESO#18	Private bank incubator for enhancing local SME’s capacities and promoting business resilience and sustainability.	BDS; follow-up support; mentoring; investment matching.	GM	1	1h15m [online]
19	ESO#19	Social innovation community to promote and support young refugees in building social enterprises.	Incubation, trainings; community programs; young refugees’ empowerment.	Co-founders	2	1h45m [in field]
20	ESO#20	Innovation Centre for farmer organizations.	Acceleration; trainings; mentoring; financial/market access.	GM	1	2h16m [in field]
21	ESO#21	Enterprise Development Centre. <i>Mission:</i> “We help Ugandan entrepreneurs build high-impact businesses.”	Incubation; mentoring; trainings; piloting services.	Country Manager	1	1h8m [in field]
22	ESO#22	Business advisory firm promoting academy ad accelerator for “faith-driven” entrepreneurs.	Training, MBAs; early-stage launchpad; coaching.	GM	1	2h2m [in field]
23	ESO#23	Association of ESOs and start-ups, working towards strengthening the entrepreneurial ecosystem.	Investment support; ESOs’ programs; advocacy; research.	GM	1	1h3m [online]
24	ESO#24	Incubator/accelerator and self-defined ‘ecosystem builder’, interconnecting entrepreneurs, academia, private sector, government, investors.	Competitions; networking; acceleration; investment matching.	Program directors	2	1h32m [in field #1] + 1h3m [online #1]
25	ESO#25	Not-for-profit social enterprise. <i>Mission:</i> “accelerate inclusive business in Uganda” for low-income consumers, retailers, suppliers.	Incubation; capacity building; acceleration; mentoring.	GM	1	51m [in field]

#	Organization	Description	Main activities	Job role	N° Int.	Duration
26	ESO#26	Finance accelerator focused on support green business.	Acceleration; access to finance; BDS.	Program Specialists	2	1h3m [online]
27	ESO#27	Donor funded accelerator and incubator focused on green start-ups.	Acceleration; incubation; training; financial support.	Senior Associate	1	51m [online]
28	ESO#28	E4Impact Uganda is related to Uganda Martyrs University, focusing on training impact entrepreneurs, while doing acceleration and cooperation programs.	MBAs; training; acceleration; cooperation programs; market access.	Country Manager	1	48m [in field]
29	ESO#29	Woman-lead foundation facilitating the creation of opportunities for female creative entrepreneurs.	Mentoring; residency for female creatives; exhibitions.	Programs Director	1	52m [in field]
30	ESO#30	Youth Hub and association that aims to support and empower Ugandan youth to transform their ideas into sustainable social ventures.	Training; think-tank activities; discussion groups; mentoring.	CEO and Founder	1	1h43m [in field]
31	ESO#31	Non-profit media, art and culture organization supporting creatives entrepreneurs with a focus on social and environmental change.	Training; mentoring; networking; lobbying; public talks; events; social media projects.	CEO and Founder	1	43m [in field]

Note: GM=General Manager, CEO=Chief Executive Officer, CFO= Chief Financial Officer, COO=Chief Operating

In total, we conducted 40 semi-structured interviews, with 31 ESOs, for more than 45 hours. We interviewed either chief executive officers, managing directors, general managers, or chief operating officers as key decision-makers in the ESOs. All interviews were conducted by at least two members of the research team and lasted on average more than one hour. These interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was approached through the lens of our research question and had no theoretical preferences, and no a priori hypotheses (Gioia et al., 2013). An important early part of our analysis was to compile and synthesize information from reports, company websites and field notes related to each of the ESOs, including their histories and activities. This was done separately for each ESO by two researchers in the team, before any differences were reconciled. The goal was to have a preliminary overview of the ESOs in our sample and generate the information reported in Table 2.

As discussed in the previous section, analysis of the interview data occurred as the fieldwork proceeded, with preliminary analysis and emerging theorizations directing further data collection towards the goal of theoretical saturation. Through this process two researchers in the team carefully analyzed the data independently, using tables to record and clarify challenges observed, practices adopted, and patterns and perceptions across the ESOs and in respect of our research question (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Once the two researchers had independently conducted their analyses of data from several ESOs, they shared and compared their work before agreeing initial theorizations. Regular meetings were then held with the wider research team to share, adjust, and refine coding and emergent theorizing, and enhance the robustness of analysis. This continuous process, detailed in three-steps below, together with triangulation with secondary data enabled a high level of inter-code reliability to be achieved. Preliminary results were also presented to participating ESOs during follow-up interviews (phase 2 of data collection explained above) to garner and incorporate their views and reduce the potential for researcher bias and subjectivity as suggested by Aguinis and Solarino (2019). Finally, the analysis was conducted with the aid of Microsoft Excel, and broadly followed an approach informed by the Gioia et al. (2013) methodology, see below:

Step 1. Developing first-order concepts: as the fieldwork progressed two researchers in the team independently read and annotated interview transcripts from several ESOs. Through a predominantly open coding process they then began to separately identify and ascribe preliminary labels to the data in the broad areas of: challenges faced by ESOs, how ESOs navigate such challenges, and consequences of this for the entrepreneurial support ecosystem. Gradually these labels were consolidated by each researcher into preliminary concepts.

Step 2. Creating second-order themes and aggregate dimensions: These first-order concepts were gathered and collapsed into second-order themes by each researcher using axial coding. An iterative process of comparison and adjustment of emerging themes in relation to existing concepts in the literature occurred (Gioia et al., 2013). Finally, second-order themes were brought together to develop preliminary aggregate dimensions.

These two-steps were followed by each researcher, with their analyses then compared and combined, before further refinement and validation by the research team, through analysis of data from more ESOs, and discussion of preliminary findings and theorizations with participating organizations. Overall, this resulted in the identification of six aggregate dimensions: one for challenges (*'challenges in resource-constrained ecosystems'*), three for practices (*'adaptation'*, *'collaboration'*, *'transformation'*), and two for entrepreneurial support (*'stagnating entrepreneurial support'* and *'flourishing entrepreneurial support'*). These are shown in the data structure in Figure 1.

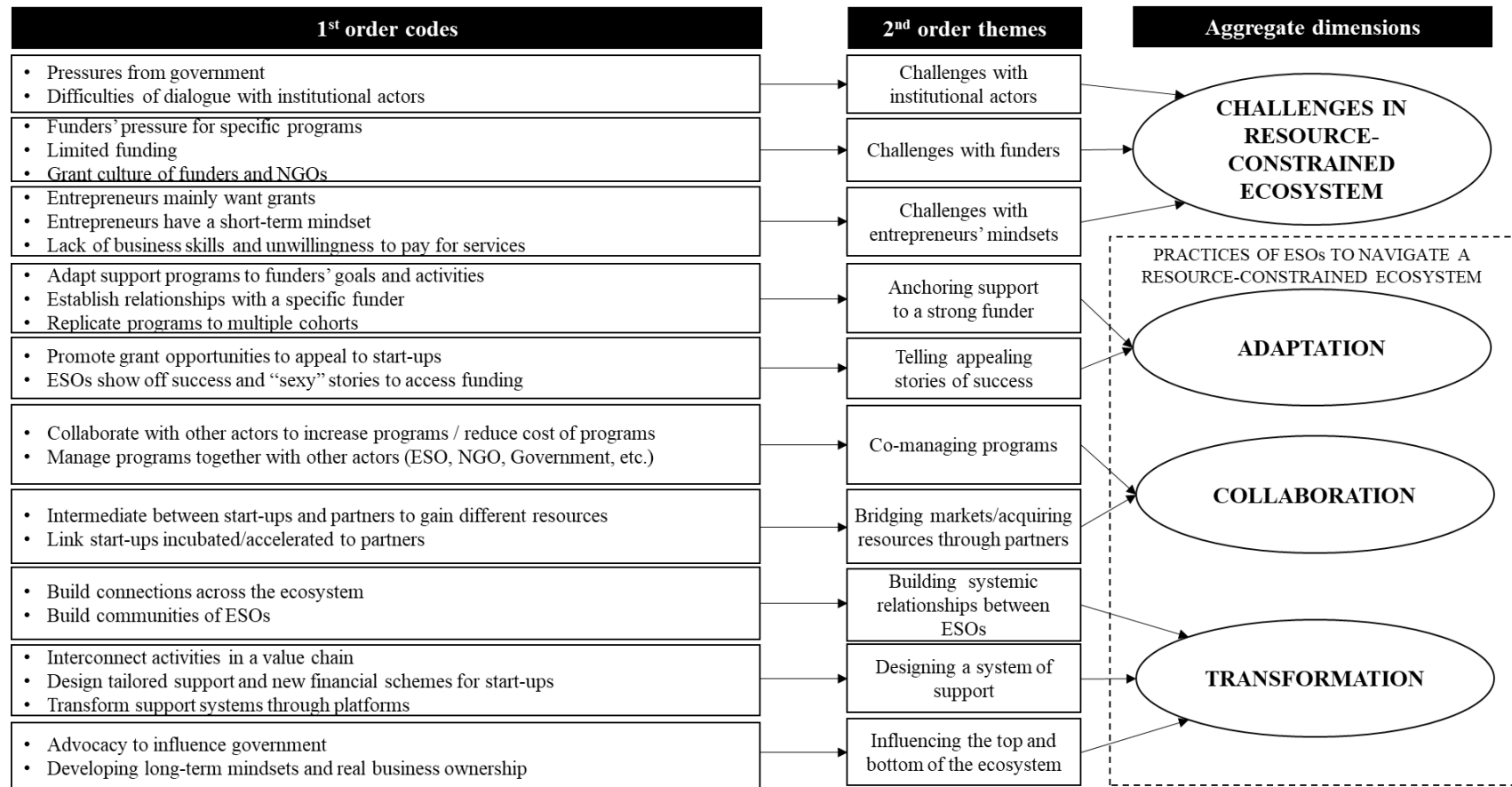


Fig. 1 Data Structure

Step 3. Building a theoretical model: In the final step, as a research team we sought to theorize interrelationships and pull together concepts in the data structure, as well as further comparing them with extant knowledge and theory. This led to the development of our theoretical model, comprising three elements: (1) the challenges ESOs face in nascent EEs, (2) the practices they adopt to navigate such challenges, and (3) the consequences of such activity for entrepreneurial support ecosystems.

FINDINGS

Our findings developed through the above data analysis process are now presented, including illustrative examples and interview quotations. A further Data Table with additional quotations is included in the paper's Supplementary Material. In Figure 2 we offer our new theoretical model.

Challenges in a resource-constrained ecosystem

We found that ESOs in the nascent EE of Uganda face three main categories of challenges: *challenges with institutional actors*, *challenges with funders*, *challenges with entrepreneurs' mindsets*.

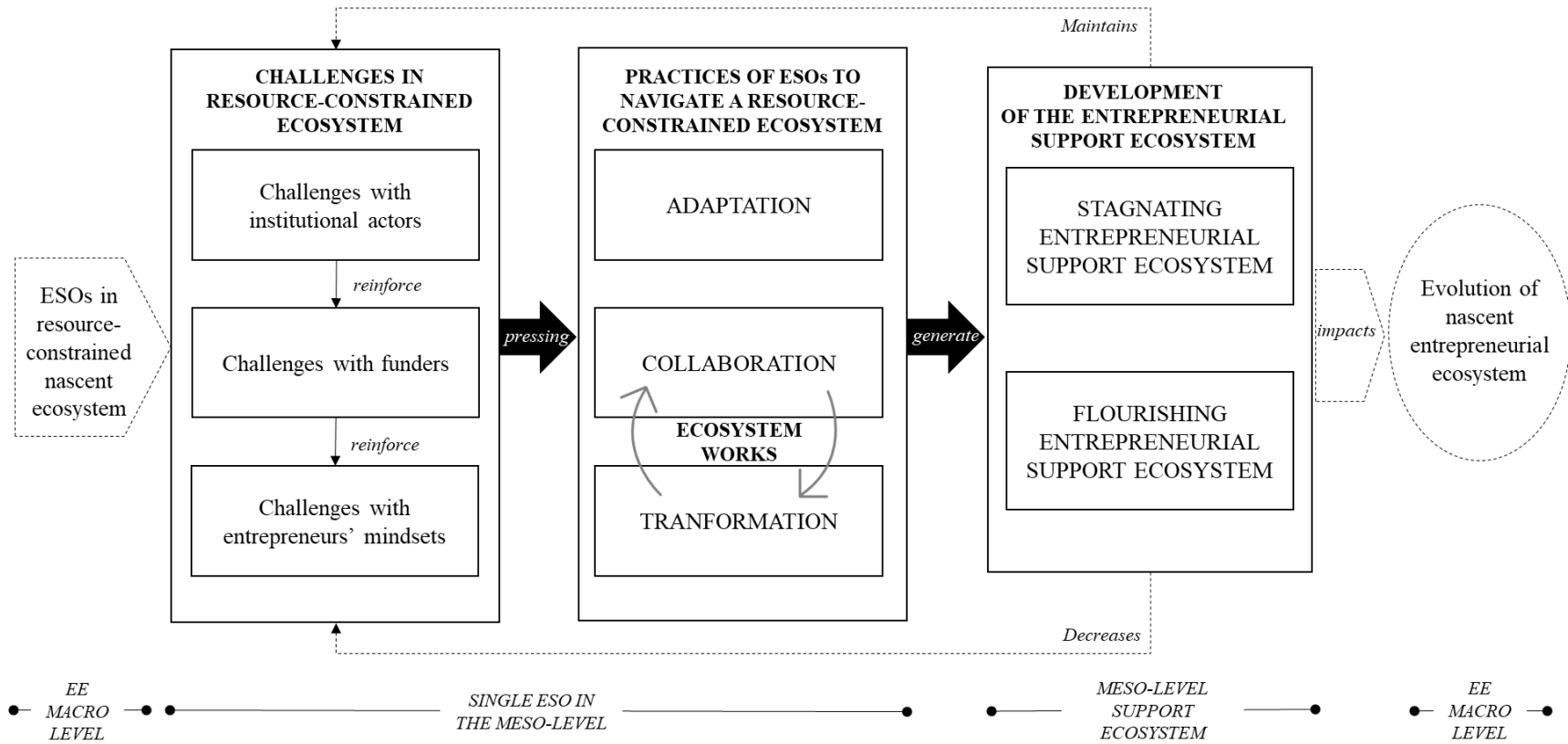
Challenges with institutional actors

First, ESOs face *challenges with institutional actors*, comprising difficult interactions with government, universities, and national/international NGOs. Government was found to pressure ESOs to generate positive results to suit political agendas and often in quite short (frequently unreasonable) timeframes. ESOs faced pressure to work in certain topic areas identified top-down such as green transitioning, technology adoption in rural areas, and education, even though these might not be their or their users' priorities or where ESO's capabilities lie. Nevertheless, delivering for and aligning with government agendas was identified as important and even necessary by various ESOs to gain and maintain legitimacy and support. For instance, ESO#1, a tech-based incubator, indicated:

We have to focus on thematic areas like agriculture, education (...) you need to be able to build something for Government if you want to operate. (ESO#1)

Several ESOs commented on having '*difficulties of dialogue with institutional actors*', with limited and unstable relationships beyond personal contacts. Uncertain payment for delivered services was also raised as a problem (e.g., delayed or not honored). A lack of knowledge on the part of institutional actors, even in universities, about what ESOs do and how to enable their work, was further identified. These problems seemed to be common and frequent for ESOs in Uganda as exemplified by the quotations below from

Fig. 2 Grounded Model



interviews with ESO#10 (humanitarian response hub) and ESO#2 (operating with universities and students):

We managed to do that MOU with government, but the government just keeps changing (...) the new minister was not interested in what we were doing in like all the MOUs and he didn't respect them. (ESO#10)

Lecturers (...) don't really have the skills or knowledge to guide entrepreneurs (...) they have no idea of the practice (...) I don't blame them (...) It's not their job. And they're not innovators, right? They never started a business; they have no exposure. (ESO#2)

Challenges with funders

Second, ESOs revealed challenges in relationships with funders. Corporate philanthropy and aid play a significant role in many African economies, including Uganda's. Interventions by NGOs, foundations, and private companies are widespread and ostensibly seek to solve pressing societal and environmental challenges, such as limited healthcare provision, food insecurity, energy poverty etc. Our data showed that in a similar way to interactions with government, wider funders pressed ESOs to concentrate their support and activities on particular thematic areas that were priorities for them according to their 'theories of change' (e.g., ESO#18: *"It was a requirement from that side to incorporate green businesses into the support that we give to entrepreneurs"*). However, these may not align with what ESOs identified as needed and in demand and may ignore possible negative implications for start-ups. Additionally, the amounts of funding available was often quite limited and accessing it competitive, as illustrated below by ESO#6 (a University Hub):

It's not easy, because we normally don't have money (...) everybody's looking for resources to support entrepreneurs. And we all speak to the same people, (...) so very little funds. (ESO#6)

Another issue identified related to the 'grant culture of funders and NGOs' which might encourage ESOs to pay more attention to quantity over quality in support programs delivered. This was discussed in various interviews and evident in field visits, where for instance dashboards with numbers of participants were prominent. For instance, an interviewee at ESO#13 stated: *"Our first program was very grants driven, we were given a tranche of money and they spent it like crazy because they had to return budgets zero."* This is also illustrated by ESO#8 which supports social enterprises:

One of the biggest problems that we have in the ecosystem is that we find that a lot of the bigger hubs are under pressure to deliver numbers. So, they don't pay a lot of attention to the

quality, rather than quantity of entrepreneurs that they can put out (...) For instance, if you get \$1 million (...) you need to deliver 500 successful social entrepreneurs. (ESO#8)

Challenges with entrepreneurs' mindsets

Third, ESOs faced various challenges in the mindsets of entrepreneurs. It was suggested in interviews that many entrepreneurs participated in support programs because they wanted grants as easy money or simply to survive, as stated below:

Grants are easy money, and it's the mindset. It's a lazy mindset for a businessman to look for grants and it happens a lot. (ESO#17)

It is complex to support an entrepreneur in an environment like this, where there is poverty, where some people are simply looking for money to survive and getting some grants. (ESO#12)

Several ESOs (e.g., ESOs #6, #15, #22) further identified that 'entrepreneurs have a short-term mindset' and approach to their businesses. There was even some suggestion this challenge was linked to cultural norms in Ugandan society, where time was perceived as having no-duration, and that there were limited possibilities for future planning. Poverty and necessity conditions further push individuals to think only of the 'now'. For instance, the director of the University Hub (ESO#6) said:

People think they can survive even without planning. That is not the same in the West (...) People here don't feel that they are in charge of their destiny. (ESO#6)

A representative of ESO#28 (a Ugandan branch of an impact-oriented foundation) similarly stated:

There is a problem of mindset (...) Most of them are really young entrepreneurs. Not so much focused. (...) They give up because they want everything shorter and faster. (ESO#28)

ESOs finally identified challenges related to entrepreneurs' (un)willingness to pay for services, and their neglect of and limited commitment to acquiring new business skills. For instance, ESOs in our sample suggested that many African entrepreneurs wanted to acquire skills rapidly but were only willing to expend minimal effort. Various ESOs further claimed that entrepreneurs are usually not ready to use the resources and funds provided to them to effectively implement their ideas. For instance, an informant stated:

Those early-stage entrepreneurs are still developing their concept (...) but they need to acquire business skills, which usually they don't have. And it takes time based on (...) small steps. But they want to rush, and get the job done soon. (ESO#7)

Even when lacking core business skills, it was argued that many entrepreneurs were unwilling to pay for support services, a situation exacerbated by the widespread availability of grants and free or heavily subsidized assistance:

They're not willing to invest into training (...) because before it was free, they're not willing to put in the time or the money. (ESO#8)

When you try to offer a paid services, there aren't many people interested because there are so many other organizations offering the training for free via grants... and it becomes difficult to actually compete in that environment. (ESO#21)

Navigating a resource constrained ecosystem

The discussed challenges in resource constrained nascent EEs drove our ESOs to adopt different navigating practices. We identified three main types of practices, which we label: *adaptation*, *collaboration*, and *transformation*. Despite these being discrete and clearly defined we found no specific pattern of adoption, meaning that ESOs could use more than one practice. We explain and illustrate each of these practices below.

Adaptation

The first practice of '*adaptation*' was so named because when deploying it ESOs try to adapt to and live with contextual resource challenges, following two main mechanisms (second order themes).

Anchoring support to a strong funder. First, some ESOs reported that they would *anchor* to a strong funder. By doing this they were a key or the main long-term implementor of programs for that funder, which became a major source of financial resources for the ESO. A downside of such interactions is that they can create subordinate relationships between funders and ESOs and raise power imbalances. When faced with reduced funding or pressed by government or grant providers, such ESOs would also often '*adapt support programs to funders' goals and activities*', for example by shifting their focus to thematic areas prioritized by the funder or changing criteria when selecting tenants. This is explained below:

There was (omitted, an international NGO, note of the authors) focusing on nutrition as a huge challenge in Africa. So, when we decided to move on that thematic area, we knew that we could anchor the partner. (...) So, we're going to work on nutrition. (ESO#10)

Most of these accelerators are dancing to the tunes of the development agencies. For example, the EU says, 'I'm only funding renewable energy'. So that's where I'm going to go, that's in the terms and conditions of that grant. And I will have to play around that (ESO#22)

In a similar vein, other ESOs suggested that it was crucial for them to ‘*establish relationships with a specific funder*’. In Uganda, government departments, NGOs, and donors of different kinds are all initiating programs seeking to leverage entrepreneurship as a tool for sustainable development. ESOs will scan for opportunities connected to such programs and try to develop partnerships with these actors. They do this by showing alignment between what they do and funder objectives, as well as highlighting their expected strong performance in delivery, with the aim once again of becoming the implementing partner of choice and receiving funds. In this sense, ESO#4, a green-business incubator, highlighted:

Another strategy for us is to get government onboard (...)so that we can convince government to fund some programs (...) because government doesn't do the implementation, okay? But government has funds for implementation. Yeah! So, we can be an implementing partner for government. (ESO#4)

By anchoring to a specific funder, ESOs also engaged in ‘*replicate programs to multiple cohorts*’ as a key aspect of their business model viability. This is illustrated by ESO#2, #6, #15, #22 and in the Supplementary Material.

Telling appealing stories of success. The second adaptation practice enacted by ESOs was to ‘talk up’ their successes and ‘impacts’, to attract start-ups and funders. In a resource-constrained EE like Uganda, ESOs need to build and maintain a positive reputation to be competitive. They did this by showcasing their capabilities in delivering appealing programs for a high number of startups and offering a promising pipeline for funders to achieve their differentiated goals. ESOs would ‘*promote grant opportunities to appeal to start-ups*’ and encourage participation in their programs (e.g., “*We received funding directly from (omitted, an international governmental organization, note of the authors) and then we designed a grant scheme which is appealing to people... So, entrepreneurs join because there is a prize at the end of the training or before the training actually starts*” ESO#18). ESOs would also publicize stories of successful entrepreneurs to attract funding and partners, often ‘dressing up’ or ‘showing off’ social and/or environmental impact components. Such publicizing aligns with the growing importance ascribed to the impact agenda in entrepreneurial support, and amongst those funding ESOs in places like Uganda, as well as the strong interest – especially amongst the young – in impact venturing. In the research it was further suggested to facilitate ESOs’ recognition and legitimacy in the EE. Interestingly, this occurred even in some instances where ESOs, in reality, did relatively little to specifically promote startups’ impact capabilities. Different aspects of these practices are illustrated below:

We push social impact stories because it's good for our funders to know that actually we're implementing that side. (ESO#1)

Social media helps us to find partners. You have to show off what you're doing, share the impact, that you're impact driven, very impactful. (ESO#19)

Collaboration

The second practice identified was *collaboration*. In resource-constrained ecosystems, ESOs navigated challenges by collaborating with other actors, and mobilizing a wider network of partners, and their differentiated resources and capabilities. Two more specific types of collaboration practices were identified:

Co-managing programs. First, we found that ESOs collaborated with partners to increase the number of programs offered or to reduce their costs. This also generated benefits for those supported. By doing this, ESOs were able to lower their dependence on funders, exploit different expertise, share resources, and scale in rural areas. This is exemplified by the following quotations:

Collaborating with different ecosystem actors enables us to deliver more (...) so sometimes we work with other actors who have already teams to deliver, or we leverage on the network of experts. (ESO#7)

We are trying to scale with (omitted, a Belgian NGO, note of the authors) in Western Uganda. So, we are most likely going to set up an office there through them. (ESO#8)

ESO's further collaborated by managing programs together with other actors, such as government, private funders, NGOs and other ESOs, a practice that enabled the co-creation of programs and alignment of expectations between them and partners ("we can co-create to fit this new environment to try to compromise with the partner", ESO #14). Some ESOs collaborated with other ecosystem actors to implement whole projects ("In most cases we implement (...) we are the implementors", ESO#1), others collaborated only in respect of a single part to access valuable and particular skills, as illustrated below by ESO#10:

We don't have such expertise, but we have relationships with so many organizations, whose expertise was that. And they support with the implementation, and we just coordinate the initiative. (ESO#10)

Bridging markets/acquiring resources through partners. Our data secondly revealed that ESOs collaborated with ecosystem partners to increase their start-ups' access to markets or to support them in acquiring different types of resources. In this sense, ESOs '*intermediate between start-ups and partners to gain different resources*'. They worked to ensure entrepreneurs were investor ready, and that start-ups' particular contexts were appreciated by investors. By doing so, ESOs were able to better align startups'

needs and mindsets with investors' expectations and vice versa. Intermediation was performed by several ESOs, such as ESO#3 (a public-private incubator):

We try to collaborate, that's what we attempt to do (...) to make sure that the fund provider understands what exactly the entrepreneur needs. And we try to help the entrepreneur understand what the funder is looking for. It's not always perfect, but that has been our approach. (ESO#3)

ESO#3 also linked 'start-ups incubated/accelerated to partners'. For instance, ESOs organized competitions and networking sessions with investors and market providers, we saw these firsthand in our field visits and participated in some. Engagement with such sessions was higher where ESOs were collaborating and working with partners. Finally, ESOs created direct links between start-ups and suppliers ("we as an ecosystem marketer", ESO#7), or potential customers, as illustrated below:

We also help them gain market access (...) so easy access to the markets, but also ensure they are building products that are meeting the demands of that market. (ESO#11)

We also organize networking sessions, where we take our entrepreneurs to meet other players in the sector and the wider actors involved in climate change. (ESO#4)

Transformation

Finally, ESOs implemented a third type of practice to navigate challenges in resource constrained nascent EEs and deliver entrepreneurial support, which we label *transformation*. Three more specific transformative practices are identified. These reveal ESOs' agency, their proactive role in mobilizing other ecosystem actors for positive change, and in innovating entrepreneurial support services.

Building systemic relationships between ESOs. First, we observed the system building work of some ESOs, who would convene organizations from different levels of the ecosystem to share opportunities and explore possibilities for collaboration. For instance, some ESOs identified events they organized with other ESOs to create wider systems of support. Examples of such events included 'Wednesday Business Surgery' coordinated by ESO#21, or the event called 'Kampala Impact Day', organized by ESO#8. Such activities contributed to better alignment and coordination between actors of different kinds and at different levels in the ecosystem, reducing tensions and enabling more continuous dialogue. We termed this activity '*Build connections across the ecosystem*' and it is well illustrated by the quotation below:

We all [ESO#s in Kampala, note of the authors] meet up once a month for a breakfast meetings, and then discuss (...) what's going on in the ecosystem (...) it's an opportunity to

network as well and find out (...) how we could communicate, and how we could collaborate as well. (ESO#21)

Extending this work, some ESOs also sought to strengthen relationships in the ecosystem with special initiatives and communities of ESOs in the support ecosystem e.g., the ‘Uganda Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Initiative’ (UEEI). As validated during field visits, such communities of ESOs and associated meetings and interactions aimed to share best practice, improve cohesiveness, address common goals, and breakdown barriers. This is illustrated by the following interview quotation which discusses an ESO’s work to create an ecosystem association:

We asked ourselves: how do we come together to work together towards a common goal? We are all like incubators. We are all accepted. And we are trying to address a common goal. So how do we come together? We set up [an association, note of the authors] with nine hubs, we have now a total number of over 30 hubs. (ESO#23)

Designing a system of support. Secondly, ESOs worked together to innovate their support and better tailor it to start-ups’ needs. ESOs sought to change the nature of support in the ecosystem and to ‘interconnect activities in a value chain’ logic. For instance, some ESOs created a joint pipeline where each ESO focused on a different single stage of support, or on a particular type of service according to their strengths. In this way, ESOs were able not only to work around the problem of limited funds, but also to increase the quality and comprehensiveness of the support available and delivered. This approach was highlighted by numerous actors, and is illustrated in the quotation below from ESO#8, showing how it was used to navigate the problem of limited funding:

We realized that was better to build a joint pipeline (...) in this way they could get funding (...) it’s a funnel (...), whoever arrive at the end goes into the (omitted, a Belgian NGO, note of the authors)program. (ESO#8)

ESOs further sought to transform the support system through developing digital and physical platforms. Platforms helped ESOs gain information about entrepreneurs, and allowed start-ups and communities to find market opportunities, new partners, or further support programs, as expressed by ESO#15 (a creative hub):

The virtual factory network (...) enables us to connect all these creative entrepreneurs together in a systemic way. And in the long term, we want to be able to provide access to finance (...) as a systemic platform. (ESO#15)

‘Influencing the top and bottom of the ecosystem’ was the third transformation practice adopted by ESOs. At the top, some ESOs, individually and collectively, engaged in advocacy work with government

to stimulate new legislative measures (e.g., the National Business Development Services (BDS) Strategy Framework, created in 2022), and to raise awareness of entrepreneurial support amongst policymakers. Accordingly, ESOs improved their dialogue with different institutional actors for the benefit of the whole ecosystem. This is illustrated below:

We also do policy advocacy. And right now, we are working on a Start-up Act. Which is going to help us to see how best we can create an enabling environment for the startup ecosystem. (ESO#23)

At the bottom, ESOs also sought to transform entrepreneurs' mindsets. For instance, encouraging a longer-term orientation and more serious behavior, as documented by many quotations in the Supplementary Material and captured well by ESO#11 (impact fund delivering support services):

It takes time to build this culture of businesses. That's why we have investment readiness programs, the trainings (...) to impact the knowledge of costing, cash management. (ESO#11)

Development of the entrepreneurial support ecosystem

Through our data analysis, we found that the practices adopted by ESOs to navigate challenges in the nascent EE had implications at the meso-level for development of the 'entrepreneurial support ecosystem'. Two main consequences are identified: (1) practices of adaptation contribute to a *stagnating entrepreneurial support ecosystem*; and (2) collaboration and transformation practices contribute to developing a *flourishing entrepreneurial support ecosystem*. We illustrate and support these claims below.

Stagnating entrepreneurial support ecosystem

ESOs isolation, competition, and dependency. First, our analysis found some ESOs that were isolated, focused on competing with others, and dependent on funders and grants. Such ESOs were particularly enacting adaptation practices. These ESOs seemed to *consider themselves silos*, worked alone, with specific partners, or only limited to a very small group of other ESOs. They shared little or no information with others and ended up duplicating programs, which is typical of adaptation practices where ESOs keep rotating grants and relative programs in the ecosystem. This situation is discussed by ESO#4 (the green business incubator):

I think there's more of us working in silos. Yeah, each entity is working at doing things on their own. So, you don't really want to come together. (ESO#4)

We found that such situations arose especially where ‘*ESOs perceived themselves in competition*’. They were competing to access funds, bring start-ups into their programs, and to get better partnerships and opportunities. In such scenarios, collaborations between ESOs were difficult and effective support for start-ups curtailed, as stated below:

You’re competing for enterprises that you’re supporting. (ESO#9)

We can only share a small component of our network in the ecosystem, because it’s a competition. (ESO#16)

We found evidence that competition and isolation were also related to ‘*Grant dependency of ESOs*’, where they were only able to give support when funds were available. For instance, ESO#22 (a faith driven incubator) said: “*Many of them, if their funders pulled out, they would close*”, a situation also confirmed by the association of ESOs (#23): “*So once the funding is finished, then the programs will also end.*” These circumstances were again usually connected to the practice of adaptation. When competing to scale within the support ecosystem, some ESOs grew through their connection with a strong funder, but this seemed to generate a closed mindset, and made operations and growth substantially reliant on grants which raises questions about its longevity and economic sustainability in the absence of a robust business model. This is illustrated by a succession of quotations from ESOs #21 and #8 which were committed to supporting impact entrepreneurs:

The only ones able to scale and also to connect with government and higher institutions are the ones with a strong funder behind. (ESO #21)

Their funders gave them money ... millions of dollars (...) they’re the best funded in the country right now. So, they don’t need anyone else, they don’t see the need to sit and talk! (ESO #8)

A second consequence of adaptation identified was ‘*start-ups’ stagnation*’ which occurred in two ways. First, ESOs reported that many entrepreneurs were dependent on grants, external support, and kept circulating within the support ecosystem seeking assistance. These startups were not able to move beyond the early stage and grow outside incubation/acceleration programs. Some practices of adaptation seemed to exacerbate this situation, for example repeated promotion of grant opportunities left startups with a grant focus and short-term mindset, as stated by ESO#11: “*they believe that grant money will keep coming in*”. Yet, as noted by ESO#2: “*once you burned the grant, there’s no way that your profits will be able to cover your costs. (...) the only option is to raise more grants*”. We labelled this evidence as ‘*start-ups are dependent on support or grants*’ (first order code), as also exemplified here:

You find that start-ups will move from our hub to another. (...) Today they get this service from us. Tomorrow, they get the other service from another actor. (...) and then they go to another hub and get another funding from there. (ESO#23)

Our data further indicated that in a support ecosystem dependent on grants, many ‘start-ups don’t grow’. This was discussed by many respondents, is illustrated in the quotation below, and suggests an unanticipated negative consequence of substantial philanthropic and donor funding on nascent EEs:

If entrepreneurs are going to rely on grants, you’re just going to stumble. You won’t scale fast. Because then you’ve tagged your revenues and your thought process to just receiving grants. (ESO#17)

In summary, we found links between practices of adaptation and the persistence of ecosystem challenges. The adoption and predominance of such practices, seemed to spur competition between ESOs, discouraged collaboration and the development systemic mindsets, and also undermined ESOs capabilities to become more financially sustainable and develop more equal dialogue and exchange with institutions. There also seemed to be downstream negative implications of such practices for entrepreneurs, for instance duplication of programs, the development of cycles and mindsets of dependency on grants and external support. Overall, we can see how adaptation practices alone could lead to a ‘stagnating entrepreneurial support ecosystem’.

Flourishing entrepreneurial support ecosystem

Our analysis found associations between ESO practices of collaboration and transformation and ‘flourishing entrepreneurial support ecosystems’, with this working through two different mechanisms (second order themes).

System of support and sustainable opportunities. First, ESOs working collaboratively and with more transformational goals were found to generate systems of support that promoted sustainable opportunities for all – both ESOs and the entrepreneurs they assist (‘from system of relationships to opportunities for ESOs’). This is exemplified by the quotation from ESOs#6 below:

This collaboration is usually as a result of relationships (...) And all those ones [other ESOs, note of the authors] are bringing you different kinds of resources, networks, or linkages. This is how we generate a flow of opportunities. (ESO#6)

Collaborative or transformative initiatives by ESOs worked to enhance connectivity amongst different ecosystem actors (e.g., by joining a community of ESOs), to enlarge or innovate support capacities, and unlock resources not previously utilized (see Supplementary Material).

We further found evidence of ESOs adopting collaborative and transformational practices in response to societal challenges. They worked to assist the marginalized e.g., refugees, those ‘left behind’, and those most acutely affected by resource scarcity or a lack of attention from traditional institutional actors. In this respect, ESOs contributed to creating a flourishing and inclusive EE for all, as illustrated by the quotation below:

We actually pushed a model to foster local empowerment(...) Individuals who come from difficult backgrounds pass through the program, and really get to know themselves better, and get a network of support. (...) We empower them, but also push them to change society, and other refugees in settlements. (ESO#19)

ESOs adopting practices of collaboration and transformation were also found to generate opportunities and societal impact by connecting with end-users and working in remote areas and with hard-to-reach populations across Uganda. This often entailed designing new programs outside of the Kampala urban area and working with different partners including ESOs elsewhere in Uganda. This was the case for ESO#5 that actively trained community-based organizations:

We work with farmer (...) community-based organizations (...) Go up there, to train them on production, we even do commitment trainings... we go out in the community and train farmers. (ESO#5)

Flourishing development of start-ups and communities. Second, we found that ESOs adopting collaboration and transformation practices provided start-ups and communities with more comprehensive, and generally more effective support to help them prosper in the longer term. To do so, such ESOs’ designed things like post-support programs for start-ups. They stayed in touch with them, checked their progress, and together with partners facilitated further support opportunities. For example, ESO#10 (the humanitarian response hub) said that they gave post-program support because it fits with start-ups needs of multiple iterations during piloting. Similarly, ESO#22 gave post-program support to start-ups selected during competitions: “*They didn’t get to win the money during the competition but were viable businesses. So, we created a six-month program to link them with mentors and other actors.*”

Our field visits enabled us to validate claims of ESOs providing business support beyond their current tenants, for instance through event series like the open ‘Wednesday Business Surgery’. We further found that some ESOs supported their entrepreneurs by facilitating the development of meaningful connections between them and local businesses as well as other tenants. This approach (‘*promotion of entrepreneurs through multiple channels*’) went beyond what we earlier described as ‘*telling appealing stories of success*’ and rather focused on creating multiple opportunities and promoting lasting collaborations to help start-

ups, wider businesses and communities prosper and grow together. This is illustrated by the following quotation:

For example: there's a big media company in the hub, and we asked them to offer services for other entrepreneurs (...) so we leverage the existing organization already working in our spaces. We want to bring new opportunities for the whole network. (ESO#16)

Finally, ESOs worked to develop links between the different entrepreneurs they supported e.g., ESO#28 created an alliance of entrepreneurs to foster opportunities with other parties involved with a Ugandan University in Kampala. Researchers from that university participated in a business plan competition where many investors were invited, an event to which two members of the research team participated during a field visit. This work of ESOs in facilitating the '*creation of communities of entrepreneurs*', where mutual support continues between startups and/in the community, is illustrated by the quotation below:

We will train them together and we have WhatsApp groups. So, they keep in touch (...) with the events that we have, but also, they are in group together on a daily base. So, they can interact (...) and create synergies. And that happens all the time! (ESO#5)

DISCUSSION

Our model depicts (1) the challenges ESOs face in resource-constrained nascent EEs, resulting in (2) the adoption of practices to navigate these constraints, and the use of which have (3) implications for the entrepreneurial support ecosystem.

In the nascent EE of Uganda, ESOs operate under severe resource-constraints that generate varied challenges. We distinguish three broad categories of challenge that are especially salient. First, *challenges with institutional actors* that try to influence and can have difficult relationships with ESOs. Second, *challenges with funders*, stemming from funder approaches but also funding scarcity in Uganda, with consequences for ESOs in terms of competition and a shift toward lower quality support. Third, *challenges with entrepreneurs' mindsets*, where entrepreneurs are always looking for grant funding and have a short-term orientation. These results extend previous work relating to challenges faced by ESOs (Theodoraki, 2020; van Rijnsoever, 2020).

Responding to these challenges we identify that ESOs may adopt three navigating practices (which we term *adaptation*, *collaboration*, and *transformation*), although these are not mutually exclusive or exhaustive. *Adaptation* reflects ESOs bowing to external pressures and working with the status quo in nascent EEs. ESOs adopting such practices may anchor to other organizations, adapt support programs to funders' goals and priorities, and somewhat myopically focus on their own appeal by sharing stories of

success to attract more start-ups and funds (Roundy & Bayer, 2019). In contrast, *collaboration* practices involve ESOs working together and with other actors to navigate resource constraints, for instance through co-managing programs with partners, and bridging start-ups and markets, e.g., the intermediation practices mentioned by Busch and Barkema (2022) amongst others. Finally, deploying *transformation* practices ESOs are agentic and proactive in finding workarounds to challenges and resource constraints in nascent EEs, including transforming the mechanisms by which support is enacted in the EE (Sydow et al., 2020; Hruskova, 2024). For example, ESOs promote more *systemic relationships* and action within the support ecosystem, design new holistic *systems of support* tailored to the varied needs of startups and wider businesses, engage in advocacy with government at the top, and work on changing mindsets at the bottom, thus influencing the EE overall.

We find that the different practices adopted by ESOs in response to nascent EE challenges, have different implications at the level of the entrepreneurial support ecosystem. We find that adaptation practices alone are associated with a '*stagnating entrepreneurial support ecosystem*', characterized by isolation, competition, and resource-dependency of ESOs, with potentially negative implications for start-ups that struggle to grow (Theodoraki, 2020). Conversely, we find that practices of collaboration and/or transformation, can lead to the development of a '*flourishing entrepreneurial support ecosystem*', for ESOs, start-ups, and local communities. In this situation, many ESOs were also found to be actively addressing broader societal challenges and contributing to the EE's sustainability (Theodoraki et al., 2022), for instance by delivering support in remote areas, providing post-support programs, and creating communities of entrepreneurs to assure mutual support.

Deepening ESO functioning in resource-constrained nascent ecosystems

This work contributes to research on the functioning of ESOs in EEs (Theodoraki et al., 2022; Dattée et al., 2018), and specifically EEs at an early/nascent stage (Roundy & Bayer, 2019). Where extant literature often assumes that ESOs are sufficiently enabled to foster productive and sustainable entrepreneurship (Volkman et al., 2021; Wurth et al., 2022), we provide novel contextualized insights on a nascent ecosystem showing this is not always the case, and what ESOs do about it. To date, literature on EEs has often focused on the outcomes of support for start-ups (e.g., Chandra & Fealey, 2009; Lamine et al., 2018). For example, van Rijnsoever (2020; 2022) found that ESOs can activate different processes of network development and in so doing improve the wider EE. Our findings suggest a more mixed picture and show that outcomes are dependent on the different practices adopted by ESOs. For instance, whilst adaptation practices can be associated with a stagnating entrepreneurial support ecosystem, collaboration and

transformation practices may result in ‘community building’, as suggested by our findings on the ‘*creation of communities of entrepreneurs*’. Our findings further compliment and extend the work of Goswami et al. (2018) and Harima et al. (2024), by showing that ESO work and practices can contribute to ecosystem additionality and catalyze their evolutionary dynamics, but the outcome again depends on the nature of the practices adopted.

Whilst a few scholars have questioned the effectiveness of ESOs (Colombo & Delmastro, 2002; Hallen et al., 2020), much work and theorizing on ESOs remains uncritical and focused on outcomes rather than their actual functioning. Furthermore, whilst there are studies of ESOs in nascent ecosystems (Hannah & Eisenhardt, 2018; Roundy & Bayer, 2019), the context for such work has still often been developed economies (Thompson et al., 2018; Content et al., 2020; Guéneau et al., 2022). There is thus still limited work on ESOs adopting more critical lenses, that examine ESO functioning, and which focuses on resource constrained nascent EEs in developing economies. Our research responds to these different limitations. It contributes to literature on nascent EEs by elucidating the nature of the challenges affecting entrepreneurial support in nascent ecosystems and theorizing three practices through which ESOs navigate ecosystem resource-constraints. We find that the first of these practices, *adaptation*, still entails resource-dependence and reactive mechanisms (Roundy & Bayer, 2019; Busch & Barkema, 2022), but also offer germinal evidence of more positive and proactive practices of *collaboration* and *transformation*. In so doing we respond to recent calls by Theodoraki et al. (2022) and others to deepen understanding of coopetition practices in ecosystems. In this sense, our view aligns with multi-level perspectives (Theodoraki & Messeghem, 2017, Messeghem et al., 2023). We see ecosystems as crafted by relationships, and designed and exploited through collaboration/transformation activities, that are in turn enacted by ESOs to navigate challenges and deliver entrepreneurial support.

Moreover, this research responds to calls for greater contextualization and geographical balance in scholarship on nascent EEs (Guéneau et al., 2022; Leger et al., 2024). By revealing the granular functioning of ESOs in the nascent emerging economy Uganda EE, we facilitate better understanding of the enablers of productive entrepreneurship in such settings. Accordingly, our study contributes to the identification of EEs’ “salient features among emerging economies” (Cao & Shi, 2021, p. 77) helping to avoid overly general and/or limited theorizing.

Unpacking the development of entrepreneurial support ecosystems

Our study contributes to efforts to better understand overall EE dynamics and processes of evolution (Spigel & Harrison, 2018), connecting with scholarship applying resource dependence perspectives

(Roundy & Bayer, 2019; Shi & Shi, 2022), and revealing the agency of ESO in mobilizing resources and enhancing ecosystem connectivity. However, we also make a more focused contribution, through enriching understanding of entrepreneurial support in nascent ecosystems. We shed light on how entrepreneurial support ecosystems are propagated, and the role ESOs can play in their evolution (Theodoraki & Messeghem, 2017), as well as in broader local sustainable development (Volkman et al., 2021; Pankov et al., 2021).

We provide deeper understanding of the dynamics and development of entrepreneurial support ecosystems (Theodoraki & Catanzaro, 2022; Messeghem et al., 2023). We uncover that the presence of resource-constraints and associated challenges lead ESOs to adopt various practices, which have differing outcomes on dynamics in entrepreneurial support ecosystems (Theodoraki, 2017; Mack & Mayer, 2016). In our model we also theorize that different dynamics at the meso-level may also have implications for the evolution of nascent EEs overall. We found that adaptation practices tend to generate '*stagnating entrepreneurial support ecosystems*', which are characterized by ESOs acting in isolation, competing, and being grant dependent, which may in turn lead to start-up stagnation. This aspect mirrors the opportunistic behaviors of ESOs identified by Theodoraki (2020), where ESOs remained focused on individual benefits, while not considering the implications of such approaches at a systems level. Conversely, we found collaboration and transformation practices bringing about more '*flourishing entrepreneurial support ecosystems*', generating a system of sustainable opportunities for both ESOs and start-up ventures, as well as local communities in Uganda. Through such practices, ESOs adopted more systemic and collective approaches (Bergman & McMullen, 2022; Hruskova, 2024), and nurtured relationships between different actors in the entrepreneurial support ecosystem (Theodoraki et al., 2022). These findings have important theoretical implications. They suggest that stagnation at the level of the entrepreneurial support ecosystem may exacerbate broader challenges in resource-constrained nascent EE. That more ESOs does not necessarily correlate with greater levels of development in the entrepreneurial support ecosystem if they are predominantly adopting adaptation practices. Conversely, even a smaller group of actors adopting collaboration and transformation practices, could catalyze a flourishing entrepreneurial support ecosystem, with positive implications for the overall EE. Thus, the effective promotion of entrepreneurship requires that ESOs in the entrepreneurial support ecosystem adopt agentic practices that allow opportunities to propagate, and which may lead to more sustainable entrepreneurial endeavors in the EE.

In much extant literature the development of entrepreneurial ecosystems is conceived of as a top-down process (Spigel & Harrison, 2018; Acs et al., 2017). Whilst some scholars have begun to show the influence on ecosystems of actors from the bottom-up, such as ESOs and startups (Theodoraki & Messeghem, 2017;

Sottini et al., 2022; Bøllingtoft, 2012; Busch & Barkema, 2022), there remains scope to better understand such processes and actions. Our study offers a novel illustration of the composite role of top-down and bottom-up approaches to ecosystem governance and development, as enabled by ESOs situated in the entrepreneurial support ecosystem. Prior research has suggested that top-down and bottom-up governance and development mechanisms may conflict (Colombo et al., 2019). Our study finds that the two approaches can be enabled and empowered through agentic ESOs. In this sense, we theorize collaboration and transformation as ‘*ecosystem work*’, which we define as efforts by ESOs to create, maintain, and disrupt entrepreneurial support ecosystems. Essentially, through *ecosystem work* ESOs contribute to reconciling top-down and bottom-up approaches to ecosystem governance and development. Our notion of *ecosystem work* also variously connects with literature identifying ESOs as institutional intermediaries (Armanios et al., 2017), as contributing to institutional change (Lawrence et al., 2013; Dorado, 2005), and as holistic systemic agents (Theodoraki et al., 2022) capable of various expertise and ecosystem orchestration practices (Goswami et al., 2018; Harima et al., 2024). We believe this is an important contribution, underlining the agency of ESOs and their efforts to develop nascent EEs by mobilizing resources and optimizing entrepreneurial support across different levels and with different actors.

Finally, our model and theorizing encourage scholars to re-think their approaches to measuring ecosystem development, and to move away from an over focus on number of actors and policies (Wurth et al., 2022). Only recently has work adopted multi-level scales (Cavallo et al., 2019; Liguori et al., 2019), and sought to include qualitative assessment of entrepreneurial support (Stam & van de Ven, 2021). With our germinal insights we contribute to addressing the urgent dilemma here summarized: “Failure to recognize entrepreneurial support and support organizing as helping scenarios could preclude ESOs from fostering entrepreneurial self-sufficiency and even undermine their primary objective, encouraging entrepreneurs to become dependent on ESOs or ESOs to become co-dependent with successful entrepreneurs” (Bergman & McMullen, 2022, p. 689). We feel that our work represents an important initial step in resolving this problem, whilst also provoking future research questions which may be explored to gain further nuance and deeper knowledge of entrepreneurial support and nascent ecosystem development.

Practical implications

This study offers practical implications, to founders, directors, and managers of ESOs, with the identification of a set of practices and mechanisms through which they can better achieve their mission of enabling entrepreneurship in resource constrained contexts. Moreover, we offer insights to governments, policymakers, and NGOs to better develop funding schemes and programs to enable the support offered by

ESOs. For instance, governments and policymakers could develop policies which encourage and reinforce interconnectivity and relationships between ESOs as well as with entrepreneurs and local communities. This reflects suggestions provided by Theodoraki et al. (2018) that successful and flourishing entrepreneurial ecosystems are built by optimizing the interconnectedness between ecosystem actors and factors and invites policymakers to build support tools to encourage ESOs to build practices to promote a common orientation.

CONCLUSIONS: LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study aimed to investigate how ESOs work around challenges in a resource-constrained nascent EE. We identified three main practices (adaptation, collaboration, and transformation) that ESOs use to navigate such challenges. We found that these practices have differing outcomes for the entrepreneurial support ecosystem where ESOs operate, leading to either stagnating or flourishing processes of evolution. Whilst its aim was achieved, this study has limitations.

Our data could be more diverse. In fact, we examined ESOs, including incubators, accelerators, hubs etc. as leading actors in the entrepreneurial support ecosystem (Theodoraki & Messeghem, 2017). This choice was made accordingly to our research question and enabled us to reach theoretical saturation after multiple rounds of sampling and data collection (Conlon et al., 2020). Nevertheless, it may have been beneficial to engage with some wider ecosystem actors, at higher (i.e., government entities, universities, funding) and/or lower levels (e.g., entrepreneurs). This would have allowed us to better triangulate our findings. Currently our triangulation is based only on comparison between primary and secondary data. In a developing country context specifically, there may also have been some other important agents we missed, for instance informal ‘middlemen’, religious or traditional leaders etc., Such actors have been identified in previous research as potentially significant business intermediaries in such settings (Busch & Barkema, 2022; Sottini et al., 2022). Building from our work, future research on this topic could integrate or even specifically focus on the perspectives of entrepreneurs or wider EE’s stakeholders to assess the role and activities of ESOs in supporting productive entrepreneurship in nascent EEs. Such work might also adopt more quantitative methodologies, to measure for instance the effectiveness of ESOs’ support programs in comparison with the entrepreneurs’ performance (e.g., sales, growth, funding received etc.) and validate whether practices of ‘collaboration’ and ‘transformation’ generate a quantitative improvement in startup results, compared with ESOs which engage in ‘adaptation’ approaches. Quantitative studies can also be developed to extend the results among other actors in the ecosystems (e.g., assessing levels of investments received etc.).

In our results we adopted the ‘umbrella’ category of ESOs as defined by Bergman and McMullen (2022). Future research could deploy a finer grained lens and provide deeper comparative analysis by distinguishing between different types ESOs with different profit/impact orientations, origins, legal forms, vocations (public, private, university etc.). Variations in ESOs may reveal differences in practices and outcomes. Our sample also largely comprised ESOs based in Kampala, with only a few running programs outside the capital city of Uganda. Future research could explore differences in ESOs operating in urban and rural areas, the dynamics of their respective development, and find possible new practices adopted and challenges faced by ESOs in more remote locations.

Over time, ESOs may engage in different practices. They may even adopt multiple practices simultaneously, for instance using both ‘collaboration’ and ‘transformation’, or somehow combining these with ‘adaptation’. Future work at more of an individual ESO leader level could explore key decision making around such adoption and shifts, as well as interaction effects. We also see these three practices as potentially part of a broader continuum of possible practices, and strategic positionings for ESOs, consistently with other studies (Vanderstraeten & Matthyssens, 2012). In this regard, future research could identify further practices, their antecedents and consequences, and look at contextual influences and differences e.g., whether certain practices are more prevalent in particular types of EEs, in certain geographies (Goswami et al., 2018; Crişan et al., 2021), under specific conditions of EE governance and leadership etc., (Colombo et al., 2019; Colombelli et al., 2019; Harima et al., 2024).

Our study focuses on a specific context, the nascent EE of Uganda. While this context is ideal for our research (Holt & Littlewood 2017; Sydow et al., 2021; Sottini et al., 2022), we believe more research is needed exploring nascent EEs in other developing economies, to extend our understanding of challenges, practices and their implications for entrepreneurial support, and how these may be informed by particular contextual factors (Chandra & Fealey, 2009) and idiosyncrasies (Goswami et al., 2018).

New research is needed to test and extend our findings and theorizing to nascent EEs in developed economies, where different kinds of challenges may prevail, institutional apparatus may be ‘stronger’, and resource scarcities less severe. Indeed, future research might investigate EEs focusing on the intensity of resource constraints, and their particularities, rather than classic and relatively binary distinctions between developed and developing economies, and their suggested resource scarcity or munificence. Given that the impact of ESOs on startup success is still debated (Hallen et al., 2020; Amezcua et al., 2013), future research could also consider whether the ESO practices we reveal have moderating or mediating effects on this relationship. Future studies building on our work could also engage with emerging debates about how EEs can ensure and foster sustainability (Volkman et al., 2021; O’Shea et al., 2022; Theodoraki et al., 2022),

as well as exploring how potentially through systemic, collective and collaborative approaches ESOs may affect sustainable and inclusive entrepreneurship (Pankov et al., 2021; Hruskova, 2024; Clayton, 2024) in nascent EEs. Furthermore, considering our findings in relation to grant dependency, future work could extend Sutter et al.'s (2019) perspective and investigate how ESOs might contribute to poverty alleviation without triggering stagnation, dependency, and potentially wider negative outcomes.

Overall, we hope our work stimulates more research on nascent EEs, deploying relational perspectives (Bergman & McMullen, 2022; Busch & Barkema, 2022) and holistic approaches (Theodoraki et al., 2022). We feel that our model, wider theory building, and rich empirical insights, all provide fruitful ground for further enquiry on mechanisms to develop entrepreneurial support initiatives and foster productive and sustainable entrepreneurship.

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ELECTRONIC SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

Annex A - Data Table with representative quotations

AGGREGATE	<i>1st order codes</i>
2nd order themes	Representative quotations

CHALLENGES IN RESOURCE-CONSTRAINED ECOSYSTEM	
Challenges with institutional actors	<p><i>Pressures from government</i></p> <p>“We have to comply with private and government sector bodies to let them appreciate what you do.” (ESO#1)</p> <p>“We have to focus on thematic areas like agriculture, education (...) you need to be able to build something for Government if you want to operate.” (ESO#1)</p> <p>“It could be purely social need. It could be purely business need. It could be purely government need, do you understand? Incubators here are pushed to be focused on Government solutions. This is what they want! (...) So, we take a look at government progress and trajectory.” (ESO#5)</p> <p>“How we’ve approached the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation? So, we show technology and innovation to interest them in us and to show them what we’ve done so far. (...) Based on their policy and the programs, because government works on five-year plan, we check how does the work is to fit in. So, we have to look at Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development. We have looked for Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation. For the wider Green Valley agriculture side, we need to get to the ministry of agriculture.” (ESO#4)</p> <p>“Incubators receive grants... It’s like political interests in this activity of gathering enterprises and give them trainings, and try to push the youth according to the political agenda.” (ESO#21)</p> <p>“Government is very interested in show up that things are moving, it seems they do a lot, you know? But they don’t do nothing.” (ESO#28)</p> <p><i>Difficulties of dialogue with institutional actors</i></p> <p>“Lecturers and the business faculties don’t really have the skills or knowledge to guide entrepreneurs (...) they have no idea of the practice, especially once it gets into innovation (...) I don’t blame them, right. It’s not their job. And they they’re not innovators, right? They never started a business; they have no exposure.” (ESO#2)</p> <p>“Universities, it’s just so hard, we had even contracts. Universities just don’t pay even if they signed. Some paid actually, but after like two years, and a lot of pushing, so it’s not worth it. Some of the ones are much bigger and established and they can pay.” (ESO#2)</p> <p>“One of our biggest failings is breaking through towards the government entities. You feel like you have established connection. But then maybe you find out that you have actually just connected with an individual and not with a government entity.” (ESO#4)</p> <p>“We managed to do that MOU with government, but the government just keeps changing (...) the new minister was not interested in what we were doing in like all the MOUs and he didn’t respect them.” (ESO#10)</p> <p>“It’s a difficult dialogue because the majority of incubation centres and service providers do not have access to speak to the government.” (ESO#21)</p>

AGGREGATE 2 nd order themes	1 st order codes Representative quotations
	<p>“Most of the government officials don’t understand what the start-ups are, they still misunderstanding and mixing up with the concept of larger corporations. So, we want them to first understand very well what the start-ups are.” (ESO#23)</p>
Challenges with funders	<p><i>Funders’ pressure for specific programs</i></p> <p>“Yes, we have to keep in line with the expectations also of the partners.” (ESO#1)</p> <p>“So, then they put them on pressure to develop a technology application. When they developed the technology application, they got the funding, but the business no longer made sense.” (ESO#8)</p> <p>“We started with support from (<i>omitted, a big-tech company, note of the authors</i>) (...) So our core mandate was building an ecosystem around technology, the promotion of technology, it was their target.” (ESO#13)</p> <p>“Collaboration with funders can work if you’ve not influenced from the design process (...) some of funders come with something already decided, that is just ticking a box.” (ESO#13)</p> <p>“It was a requirement from that side to incorporate green businesses into the support that we give to entrepreneurs; at the certain point we then decided to incorporate green enterprise.” (ESO#18)</p> <p>“The fund comes in and say: we are giving you 500k for this number. So, they put pressure on it, and you have to do.” (ESO#22)</p> <p><i>Limited funding</i></p> <p>“Financing for the consumptive business incubation component is a real hard, you have to keep and keep applying to get the financing.” (ESO#4)</p> <p>“It’s not easy, because we normally don’t have money (...) everybody’s looking for resources to support entrepreneurs. And we all speak to the same people... you talk to whoever is supporting entrepreneurs, so very little funds” (ESO#6)</p> <p>“Getting local funding is difficult.” (ESO#8)</p> <p>“The other downside is also the lack of financial support for especially the local enterprise support organizations. We find it very hard to rise capital in the ecosystem, and it’s an issue.” (ESO#9)</p> <p>“We also have, you know, liquidity problems always looking for new investors.” (ESO#12)</p> <p>“Anyone within the ecosystem should have access to those investors. (...) at the moment, there might be out of 300 incubation centres and service providers, and very few of them have access to the right type of funds.” (ESO#21)</p> <p><i>Grant culture of funders and NGOs</i></p> <p>“NGOs usually are interested about numbers. We go to get them numbers, because sometimes their targeting a certain number, so we make sure that we’re trying to hit that number.” (ESO#1)</p> <p>“This donor-driven entrepreneurship ecosystem is not healthy, because it doesn’t like the project durations and the setup don’t encourage continuous improvement at all.” (ESO#2)</p>

AGGREGATE	<i>1st order codes</i>
2nd order themes	Representative quotations

“One of the biggest problems that we have in the ecosystem is that we find that a lot of the bigger hubs are under pressure to deliver numbers. So, they don’t pay a lot of attention to the quality, rather than quantity of entrepreneurs that they can put out (...) For instance, if you get \$1 million from (*omitted, an international NGO, note of the authors*), you need to deliver 500 successful social entrepreneurs.” (ESO#8)

“Our first program was very grants driven, we were given a tranche of money, and they spent it like crazy because they had to return budgets zero.” (ESO#13)

“There’s an issue of development agencies that are coming with a grant mindset.” (ESO#22)

“We find that even government programs that are supposed to help start-ups (...) just give them some money to improve whatever they’re doing, so just giving out money in the villages.” (ESO#28)

Challenges with entrepreneurs’ mindsets

Entrepreneurs mainly want grants

“Usually, entrepreneurs come here just because they’re looking for more fundings to run their business.” (ESO#1)

“They want to see money immediately, even before understanding their business completely (...) Some drop out because they don’t see the money coming easily.” (ESO#4)

“That is true. That’s a common problem. Some of them are just looking for money, by the way.” (ESO#6)

“It is complex to support an entrepreneur in an environment like this, where there is poverty, where some people are simply looking for money to survive and getting some grants.” (ESO#12)

“You’re always going to be searching for grants, rather than building a business.” (ESO#8)

“So, at the beginning, putting a fee to have the sustainable aspect was a bit difficult because there was another expectation that was we are coming here because we have some sort of seed funding and all these other things are going to help us grow.” (ESO#16)

“Grant it’s easy money, and it’s the mindset. It’s a lazy mind for a businessman to look for grants and happen a lot.” (ESO#17)

“There’s also a portion of all of them, that do the programs strictly for grant funding.” (ESO #18)

AGGREGATE	<i>1st order codes</i>
2nd order themes	Representative quotations

“So, you find people building a business model over that someone should come and fund me along the way.” (ESO#22)

Entrepreneurs have a short-term mindset

“People think they can survive even without planning. That is not the same in the West. (...) People here don’t feel that they are in charge of their destiny.” (ESO#6)

“This was a matter of mentality of entrepreneurs, I was talking about that in the short-term approach, which is far from the reality.” (ESO#8)

“A business that is surviving on grants normally don’t have the sustainability element in them. Because they believe that grant money will keep coming in. And they spend without bringing in the element of: how do I regenerate?” (ESO#11)

“When we meet with entrepreneurs, and we talk to them about how they price their products, this the idea of a margin is something that’s a huge idea. It’s a matter of mentality because they’re just thinking about cash flows. If I end the day with cash in my pocket, it’s a good day, no matter if they lost money on that product, do they have cash in their pocket at the end of the day? That’s what the idea is.” (ESO#15)

“Entrepreneurs out of necessity are short term and those are the ones where we have challenges even as during our courses, when you call them for training (...) because they’re not willing to even get training, because they are not seeing the bigger picture.” (ESO#22)

“There is a problem of mindset (...) Most of them are really young entrepreneurs. Not so much focused. (...) They give up because taper wants everything shorter and faster.” (ESO#28)

Lack of business skills and unwillingness to pay for services

“The other challenges of finance, for example, it’s also a very complex thing to get. We don’t have a lot of money chasing ideas; we have a number of people chasing the money. But often they’re not ready to actually take it.” (ESO#3)

“Those early stage entrepreneurs, an early stage means one two years, still proving their concept that introduces a product to the market. They needed to acquire business skills. And it takes time based on small things.” (ESO#7)

“They don’t know that not increasing their service rate rapidly is going to affect their sales and so it is going to hinder them from paying obligations in time.” (ESO#11)

“When you deal with these very early stages entrepreneurs you can raise a lot of capital, but the problem is the managing of this capital, because you can give them a lot of money but then who will do the deployment?” (ESO#12)

“Capital alone cannot solve the problem. Even if I gave you \$1,000,000 with no idea you waste it. (...) And you find that many of the entrepreneurs that starts (...) they have no idea in terms of finance, in terms of HR and management of HR. They have no idea in terms of operations. They still need support and handholding in terms of growing networks and marketing.” (ESO#17)

“It is important that you have first the skills before talking of resources. This is missing in many (...) Learning how to sell, learning how to fundraise, learning how to pitch, learning how to be confident in front of people.” (ESO#19)

ADAPTATION

AGGREGATE 2 nd order themes	1 st order codes Representative quotations
Anchoring support to a strong funder	<p><i>Adapt support programs to funders' goals and activities</i></p> <p>"So, part of the work that has to be done by an incubator is to align, study and align" (ESO#1)</p> <p>"So, what we execute on is depending on what the development partner wants, so it could be acceleration, it could be training." (ESO #7)</p> <p>"For example: nutrition. There was (<i>omitted, an international NGO, note of the authors</i>) focusing on nutrition. So, when we decided to take on that thematic area, we knew that there were the anchor partner. So, as ESO#10 we're going to work for nutrition." (ESO#10)</p> <p>"One of our strategies is working with institutions, to open new spaces according to what they want." (ESO#14)</p> <p>"Another important aspect is the implementation. For example: (<i>omitted, an international NGO, note of the authors</i>) launched a program, it's great. Then, the hub develops a model which adhere on them to be implemented." (ESO#16)</p> <p>"We decided to incorporate green enterprise for two reasons. One, because there was a decline in the numbers of start-ups, two because it was a requirement from the donor." (ESO#18)</p> <p>"Most of these accelerators are dancing the tunes of the development agencies. For example: EU says 'I'm only funding renewable energy. So that's where I'm going to go, that it's the terms and conditions of that grant. And I will have to play around that. That is not sustainable. (...) development agencies, the funders, need to be aware of the local needs of the entrepreneurs." (ESO#22)</p> <p>"We know we have to shape ourselves on the needs of the funders, because you need the money." (ESO#22)</p> <p>"It's more or less customising our different solutions for different stakeholders." (ESO#24)</p> <p><i>Establish relationships with a specific funder</i></p> <p>"Another strategy for us is to get Government onboard. (...) like getting the Government to appreciate our work, so that we can convince Government to fund some programs. (...) because Government doesn't do the implementation, okay? But government has funds for implementation. Yeah! So, we can be an implementing partner for Government" (ESO #4)</p> <p>"We are an independent entity. But we are hosted at (<i>omitted, an international NGO, note of the authors</i>). (...) we also work on several projects with them" (ESO#10)</p> <p>"Sometimes we have collaborations with NGOs. That's because they have some consistency in their payment. And with that, we're then able to subsidise the smaller packages." (ESO#16)</p> <p>"We have a program called Business Labs, their goal is to build a European market linkages and value chains in like new areas in agriculture. (...) So for our next program, there will be an anchor partner in terms of European market linkages." (ESO#16)</p> <p>"The only ones able to scale and also to connect with government and higher institutions are the ones with a strong funder behind." (ESO#21)</p> <p><i>Replicate programs to multiple cohorts</i></p> <p>"But for the university program, for example, we are already on it, because it's very steady, and we know exactly what to do. (...) And there's a big pool, basically, and it's easy to replicate" (ESO#2)</p> <p>"For every cohort we organise the bootcamp. Then, we organise a business plan competition, normally it is targeting students, they are people at the very first stage, they don't know anything about an idea, they don't have a unique idea. So, you take them through the process to the table, and they're pitching their ideas for a panel of judges." (ESO#6)</p>

AGGREGATE 2 nd order themes	1 st order codes Representative quotations
	<p>“How many people are training women? (...) There’s a lot of duplication, you will get to hear stories from the different actors that we are doing a lot of duplications.” (ESO#7)</p> <p>“To attract people and funds we run programs. So, we do open calls for different programs. People walk in, from time to time, from day to day, to be able to see what’s going on here. (...) similar programs, but in different areas.” (ESO#15)</p> <p>“They all care about the people coming into the program, because they need to justify the funding to their anchor partner. So, you find that most of those accelerators do not even have post program initiatives, but they just replicate to similar cohorts.” (ESO#22)</p>
Telling appealing stories of success	<p><i>Promote grant opportunities to appeal to start-ups</i></p> <p>“So, we have to show we provide some access to fundings. Yes, because most of them have already done training programs, and now are just looking for funds.” (ESO#1)</p> <p>“You have elements of investment cause from our understanding is that most companies want, giving them business advisory alone is never enough (...) So all our programs including the Seed program, do offer access to finance. The Seed program offers access to finance through the Seed Award, so they call a Seed Award it’s a global competition.” (ESO#9)</p> <p>“Start-ups come because the fee is super subsidised because there’s a funder paying at the top.” (ESO#16)</p> <p>“We received funding directly from (<i>omitted, an international governmental organization, note of the authors</i>) and then we designed a grant scheme which is appealing to people... So, entrepreneurs join because there is a prize at the end of the training or before the training actually starts.” (ESO#18)</p> <p><i>ESOs show off success and “sexy” stories to access funding</i></p> <p>“We push social impact stories because it’s good for our funders to know that actually we’re implementing that side. So internal accountability. Also, like I said, our mission is to help startup growing...” (ESO#1)</p> <p>“They sat there, and they basically became the face and the success story for Gulu, and they were basically used. Their story was used to show how well the hub was doing. And, and you hear it all the time.” (ESO#2)</p> <p>“You have to write to the funders, write to them and inform them about our work. Then also reporting to them showing them this year this is what we’ve done, those are my success start-ups.” (ESO#4)</p> <p>“We were in the Innovation Village at the beginning, but we moved out. Because there’s a narrative they put out. For example, they said ‘our company is (<i>omitted</i>)’. But it is not your company!” (ESO#9)</p> <p>“We have events here, which allow people to get to understand the work that we do. But yeah, it’s just a lot of being able to be out in the public eye telling our story, whether that’s through events, whether that’s through programming, is really pushing to keep our name out there and attract more people.” (ESO#15)</p> <p>“Social media help in find partners. You have to show off that you’re doing sharp the impact, that you’re impact driven, very impactful.” (ESO#19)</p> <p>“We make a lot of noise on Twitter, so we see a lot of young chaps who are like, ‘Oh, I’d like to volunteer for X period of time.’... the same with the funders.” (ESO#24)</p>

AGGREGATE	<i>1st order codes</i>
2nd order themes	Representative quotations

COLLABORATION

Co-managing programs

Collaborate with other actors to increase programs / reduce cost of programs

“We work with the US District commercial offices; we work with sometimes local NGOs which have a presence in specific places. (...) we have worked with a number of agencies which are locally based, then we also sometimes work with private sector players, like banks, like insurance companies, which we might want to leverage to achieve our goals.” (ESO#3)

“We don’t work with only (*omitted, a local university, note of the authors*), we work with all the university that have agriculture (...) So, all those universities that has agriculture, we get students and researchers from there.” (ESO#5)

“No Incubator has everything for the entrepreneur (...) You need to keep interacting to find who is doing this, who is doing that... We can always share the common understanding.” (ESO#6)

“We think even collaborating with a different ecosystem actor enables us to deliver more (...) so sometimes we work with other actors who have already teams to deliver, or we leverage on the network of experts (...) we think we can run these programs effectively if we are collaborating with different ecosystem actors. But also, sometimes we collaborate with different hubs or incubators, for example, to delivery model bootcamp.” (ESO#7)

“We are trying to scale with (*omitted, a Belgian NGO, note of the authors*), we are looking at Western Uganda. So, we are most likely going to set up an office in Western Uganda.” (ESO#8)

“We have partnerships with organisations that already have structures in these communities.” (ESO#9)

“It’s maybe an NGO that is focusing on delivering a certain solution or a refugee-led organisation (...) working with them, we can split the cost.” (ESO#10)

“We tried to collaborate with ESO#24 to increase number of programs. So, I could also market myself as a trainer to their programs.” (ESO#12)

“You find that some ESO begin to collaborate because they found out they’re doing the same kind of work. They found out that they can deliver on the same program beta. And they began joining together because instead of struggling to deliver alone, now they are delivering together.” (ESO#23)

“There’s so many organisations here that are enrolled in women emancipation and empowerment and they’re looking for people like us to partner with (...) so other organisation that are doing something matchable, (...) We can co-create the projects.” (ESO#29)

Manage programs together with other actors (ESO, NGO, Government, etc.)

“In most cases we implement, we are the implementors, they come up you know with the concept and everything, and then we implement the program.” (ESO#1)

“We have worked closely with the government of Uganda development agencies to support entrepreneurs in various spaces.” (ESO#3)

“There were (*omitted, an international NGO, note of the authors*) and the university. So it was a partnership and (*omitted, a local university, note of the authors*) was the implementing partner.” (ESO#4)

“So, ESO#13 is now coordinating the initiative. For us. We are an incubator, who bring entrepreneurs to that initiative, when they make a call for it for entrepreneurs, we come to our network and support them to join.” (ESO#6)

AGGREGATE 2 nd order themes	1 st order codes Representative quotations
	<p>“We don't have such expertise, but we have relationships with so many organisations, whose expertise was that. And they support with the implementation, and we just coordinate the initiative.” (ESO#10)</p> <p>“So, what we do is we partner with different entities, like the development partners, and government, who will then utilise our capacity and expertise to support the entrepreneurs.” (ESO#13)</p> <p>“If a partner came on board and says: ‘now we want to build a program about for example mentoring and coaching’, and we might not have a training culture. (...) we can co-create to fit this new environment to try to compromise with the partner.” (ESO#14)</p> <p>“We have different ways to partner with other actors. But for instance, with ESO#13 it's through implementing partner networks. (...) We are the outsource people come through their programs into our program. We train for them, and we are actually paid for that service.” (ESO#18)</p> <p>“(Omitted, an international NGO, note of the authors) gave money to ESO#24. The ESO#24 brought together about 10 members. So, ten of our innovation hubs were able to work together. And they delivered on a program together with ESO#24, which was under the (omitted, an international NGO, note of the authors).” (ESO#23)</p> <p>“We are running two exhibition partnerships. So, the partners bring the money, and we do the exhibition, we found support. For example, we got the space at the University Gallery, and then we put in some money into the organisation for the small little things which we need.” (ESO#29)</p>
Bridging markets/ acquiring resources through partners	<p><i>Intermediate between start-ups and partners to gain different resources</i></p> <p>“We try to collaborate, that's what we attempt to do. To make sure that if there is a miscommunication, the funder understands what exactly the entrepreneur needs. And to the extent we can do that, we try to help the entrepreneur understand what the funder is looking for. It's not always perfect, but that that has been our approach.” (ESO#3)</p> <p>“Because investors will trust ESO#7 to invest in a business, but directly in the entrepreneur it's not so. (...) we have gone through acceleration programs (...) we have experience of how they are repaying us. So, somebody will trust (...) if we are giving a good reference.” (ESO#7)</p> <p>“We encourage the investors to come visit. Actually, we say ‘go with the entrepreneur, see what problems they're trying to solve!’ By going to the communities themselves where entrepreneurs operate, they can understand, so that by the time they invest in, they actually know what they're putting their money into this fund. (...) So we collaborate to mediate such relationship.” (ESO#8)</p> <p>“We are partnering with the impact investors and financial institutions to give our entrepreneurs access to debt and equity.” (ESO#9)</p> <p>“We've just had to have like several conversations with the senior management to understand that the start-ups you're working with, cannot report like how (omitted, an research organization, note of the authors) reports to (omitted, an international NGO, note of the authors) (...), so things like that, like to try to have contracts that can actually work for the start-up.” (ESO#10)</p> <p>“We're trying as much as possible to connect them. (...) We'd like to do the same thing with the investors. We connect them when they're not yet on the ground. But don't send me any money, don't do anything until you actually come to the ground and visit these businesses and get to understand them.” (ESO#8)</p> <p>“Our approach is you know, as I said, the skills, the gaps between entrepreneur and investor skills, capital, and they need adventure building training.” (ESO#12)</p>

AGGREGATE	1 st order codes
2 nd order themes	Representative quotations
	<p>“We also have investors who have their money that they didn’t know where to invest. So we guide them on where to invest because we have worked with startups before. So we know that startups are profitable. So we bridge that gap. We connect the startup to the investor.” (ESO#17)</p> <p>“Practically at that point in that six months, we are working with them on their businesses with other consultants but creating an opportunity for investor matching.” (ESO#22)</p> <p><i>Link start-ups incubated/accelerated to partners</i></p> <p>“During the training we do invite them, we let investors come, the business analyst, to make sure they see we have an event and make sure we invite them during trainings, and we have back up sessions. We organize selling pitch. But we mostly we invite at the meetings and then later on the program.” (ESO#1)</p> <p>“We connect them to farmers. (...) We have the databases for all is working. So the incubatees want coffee? We know that there is this one, this one, this one, we connect, Okay, they want mango? We know the farmers producing mango for that...” (ESO#5)</p> <p>“We collaborate with a number of organizations and government agencies, to make sure that you guys are connected. A couple of weeks ago, you were engaged with someone from the Uganda Investment Authority. So some of our entrepreneurs can get opportunities to speak. So we do everything possible to first of all deliver information. And then make linkages where we can.” (ESO#3)</p> <p>“We also organize networking sessions, where we take our entrepreneurs to meet other players in the sector and the wider climate change.” (ESO#4)</p> <p>“In phase two, we are working with people that that are already running their business, but we don’t have much to give them for example. For instance, we don’t have any funding for entrepreneurs. If an entrepreneur wants the machine, we don’t give money to them. (...) we know somebody in the ecosystem, who may possibly support them to do that.” (ESO#6)</p> <p>“So, we’ve made a direct link with them, as well as other investors, such as ESO#11. (...) So, we made a link with all these different people. And now whoever will go through our program to then be presented to these people, as well as individual investors.” (ESO#8)</p> <p>“We will find the potential partners are financial institutions, with organisations, for example, that are going to create linkages for the companies that we’re supporting.” (ESO#9)</p> <p>“Because ESO#10 we are not like health experts or we don’t have any health facility, but now like (<i>omitted, an research organization, note of the authors</i>) is working with specific health facilities, so (<i>omitted, an Ugandan social enterprise, note of the authors</i>) is going to scale up in the health facilities of (<i>omitted, an research organization, note of the authors</i>).” (ESO#10)</p> <p>“We bridge to create impact. We offer to our entrepreneurs, which are here, a bridge in different ways, first of all across African countries. And secondly, in a vertical way with European countries.” (ESO#16)</p> <p>“We connect that start-ups with mentors, with trainers, connect them with investors. So connect them with the stakeholders that they require connection with.” (ESO#21)</p>

TRANSFORMATION

AGGREGATE 2 nd order themes	1 st order codes Representative quotations
Building systemic relationships between ESOs	<p><i>Build connections across the ecosystem</i></p> <p>“Even than our networking events that we organise, also help a lot for us to know who is doing what and who can support to, then bring them together” (ESO#4)</p> <p>“We were playing a big part to try to build an ecosystem in a more sustainable way. And by not creating silos (...) Work together, this avoid duplication, who is not adding value to the ecosystem.” (ESO#7)</p> <p>“The Kampala Impact Day is an effort to bring together all these different players in the ecosystem, the incubators, that acceleration programs, the funders... all in one space! So that we can have conversations to ones, how better we can collaborate, how we can co-create projects, programs, that will be beneficial to all entrepreneurs.” (ESO#8)</p> <p>“As a support organisation, we’re definitely just continuing to be proactive in building relationships with the different actors.” (ESO#10)</p> <p>“We have informal catch ups with different ecosystem marketers. Like once a week, okay, we tried to do it once a week, sometimes we can go like, can’t do it, maybe twice a month. Informal catch up. Like just to build a relationship.” (ESO#10)</p> <p>“The other reason to collaborate is celebration, really, with kind of a flagship event.” (ESO#13)</p> <p>“Every year we do something called Kampala Innovation Week... Activities that are pushing us to talk to each other.” (ESO#16)</p> <p>“We all meet up once a month for breakfast meeting, and then discuss, you know, what’s going on in the ecosystem. And also, it’s an opportunity to network as well, and find out what each of us is doing and how we could communicate, and how we could collaborate as well.” (ESO#21)</p> <p>“We have an activity that brings together these hubs every year, which is called the Uganda Innovation Week, before it was the Kampala Innovation Week where we would bring all these hubs together and they collaborate, work together. (...) And see how best they can deliver on their mandates.” (ESO#23)</p> <p>“The Kamapala innovation week this year is going to run in October, but it really brings together, it’s like an Expo, bringing together everyone from their universe. So, that’s corporate, government, entrepreneurs, development agencies and they are able to discuss, engage on different topics really that effect their ecosystem.” (ESO#24)</p> <p><i>Build communities of ESOs</i></p> <p>“We gave birth to an organisation called Uganda Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Initiative, whose job is to do just that. (...) We have now a leading organisation called ESO#23, which brings a number of these players on board. So, I think that this is a progress, and also the funding or the resources going into it have increased. They’re not mismatch.” (ESO#3)</p> <p>“We have tried our level best to be a friend to everyone, a friend of everyone, so that we can even when we get down entrepreneurs for different programs, we reach out to all these different institutions.” (ESO#8)</p> <p>“That is really like just being part of an ecosystem. community. So we are part of this community, there’s what we call communities of practice (...) in the humanitarian response, INGOs have just created these different communities of practice where we can share, like, what is happening in the ecosystem, (...) being part of those communities of practices helps you build relationship.” (ESO#10)</p>

AGGREGATE	<i>1st order codes</i>
2 nd order themes	Representative quotations
	<p>“Like a sub-ecosystem. Yeah, so you’ll find different NGOs, NGOs, private sector, I think we should go in states, who are maybe in the area of health, they like maybe to meet once a month, it could be either online or in person, they agree on the frequency, come together, share what is happening, and things like that.” (ESO#10)</p> <p>“For us creating a community it’s around working with all these different organisations. How could we drive more collaboration in the ecosystem? We work on improve cohesiveness.” (ESO#13)</p> <p>“The ecosystem is much different than it was three years ago before Startup Uganda started, because now we have an association to be together.” (ESO#16)</p> <p>“We were one of the founding members of ESO#23. (...) the idea was to take away silos. And we’re excited.” (ESO#16)</p> <p>“Every year we bring ecosystem players together. And every year, we actually have a theme that we are talking about. This time we were talking about catalysing ecosystem engagement for the benefit of entrepreneurs. (...) It’s like a community.” (ESO#22)</p> <p>“We asked ourselves: how do we come together to work together towards a common goal? We are all like incubators. We are all accepted. And we are trying to address a common goal. So how do we come together? We set up ESO#23 with nine hubs, we have now a total number of over 30 hubs.” (ESO#23)</p> <p>“Many founders actually want collaboration to happen. (...) That’s why the fund is coming in now support ESO#23 to be able to bring these members more and more together.” (ESO#23)</p>
Designing a system of support	<p><i>Interconnect activities in a value chain</i></p> <p>“Our approach has been to date: focus on the non-financial, partner with people, banks and microfinance as usual for the financial.” (ESO#5)</p> <p>“We consider also the middleman in the supply chain. And we actually train them. We train them, we give trainings, especially in the handling, post-harvest handling.” (ESO#5)</p> <p>“When they go through a certain stage that we have taken them through, we say now, we are sending you to this incubator. They have an interesting program, which you should join. So, join!” (ESO#6)</p> <p>“Now the at early and take off stage there are gaps. But where are those gaps, as identified by these businesses need skill? We need to get a partner who’s willing to pay for it. And as we’re working with development partners. (...) If they go through a growth stage, we need to have the business advisor and consulting to support them on the challenges that come through the growth stage.” (ESO#7)</p> <p>“In 2020, late 2020, were introduced by a mutual connection to (<i>omitted, a Belgian NGO, note of the authors</i>): which is entrepreneurs for entrepreneurs. So there is a Belgian NGO, that also focuses on accelerating entrepreneurs, giving them mentorship from a large group of former executives of different companies that are offering their services in a voluntary basis to these start-ups. (...) at the end of their program for them, they put in their own capital, they put in between 5000 to 50,000 euros per project.” (ESO#8)</p> <p>“We talk more with entrepreneurs by entrepreneurs, they are programs aligned, because they’re also supporting social entrepreneurs. But at a different level from the ones that we are supporting, we are supporting the early stage entrepreneurs they’re supporting the growth stage.” (ESO#8)</p> <p>“The more we were talking in our team, the more we realised that it was better to build a joint pipeline, where the ones who go through the Einstein Rising program, go straight into the (<i>omitted, a Belgian NGO, note of the authors</i>) program. And yeah, in this way they could get</p>

funding (...) now it's a funnel, more entrepreneurs we narrow it down, and then whoever arrive at the end goes into the *(omitted, a Belgian NGO, note of the authors)* program" (ESO#8)

"Now we at least have a serious carrot at the end of our stick: they go through our intense program. You get accepted by *(omitted, a Belgian NGO, note of the authors)* and you get funding at the end... We basically joint the programs." (ESO#8)

"We're supporting them and seed funding. But when that seed funding is done, at least they will have the *(omitted, a research organization, note of the authors)* structures to continue working, they will have built a relationship with *(omitted, a research organization, note of the authors)*, even if ESO#10 steps away, so there is room for next steps that they can move forward." (ESO#10)

"Given the solution, it's more likely to sell if they go through, like, oh, we know that maybe save the children is in (...) So that's like just advising them on their plans. And then connecting them to other ecosystem after I mean, ecosystem support organisations that are good in business development, to help them build a business model around that, and how to like, actualize it." (ESO#10)

"Lots of our clients comes from other funds that don't have the right target of funds for them. So they send you to us." (ESO#11)

"What ESO#23 is doing is trying to find more projects that come to the association. And then distribute that to members according to their strengths." (ESO#16)

"We partner with other incubators and investment firms in the ecosystem that have investment opportunities and provide these services to our incubates after they have gone through our program. So, we do organize either through networking sessions or online masterclasses. So, they're able to interface with the investor." (ESO#18)

"Our role is to identify how best they can become a startup or scale of start-ups. So we have to engage with them to identify what they need. And then from those processes, we either offer them initial training, we can deliver it ourselves because we have a network of people that can deliver those trainings. Or if that's not what's required, we can refer them to other incubation centres." (ESO#21)

"They're doing some incubation program and it's the same, but you can join forces to serve a bigger crowd or a better crowd. So, try to break the silos mindset." (ESO#23)

Design tailored support and new financial schemes for start-ups

"The initial money plus the two year support comes as a revenue based equity model. So what that means is we take a stake, and they buy back the stake through a revenue share. Okay, so having the stake enables us to give them loans without needing a lending licence and registering as a lending institution." (ESO#2)

"Right through the several approaches with the universities, it's really to build your student, you're interested in starting something you consider being an entrepreneur, basically, you find a place where you can get everything that you need to take the next steps, right, this is one of the ground floor. Exactly. This is very early stage; this is focused on universities for now. And then if we look at the catalyser, for example, it's to get to build a place that where you can go as an entrepreneur, if you need early stage support, that increases your success chances dramatically and helps you get access to the finance that you need." (ESO#2)

"We also give them a little bit of cash. It's a bit more than \$1,000 in the beginning, and they have access to cheap patient unsecured loans on top of that." (ESO#2)

AGGREGATE 2 nd order themes	1 st order codes Representative quotations
	<p>“We do that in their business trainings to for them to segment because at some point not everyone is your market. So through a segmentation, they’re able to know that this one will afford this market will not afford to solely focus on those segments that can afford.” (ESO#4)</p> <p>“Yes, done some consultants in this consultancies, we are actually identifying the needs of the entrepreneurs (...), but that helped us to get to know what are the needs of the companies that are in the growth stage, because they normally have something different from the start-ups.” (ESO#4)</p> <p>“No they don’t pay a fee, they run their activity and walk the private sector. We give them some grants to start. Others can become members, they pay the membership fee, but they always start paying us when using our facilities. It’s a fee to use. (...) We work the user fee. The user fee per output.” (ESO#5)</p> <p>“We develop a debt facility we call ESO#7. We are investing in early stage businesses that have the potential to scale. (...) It won’t make money for us, but we think if we support these businesses, provide for a second or third investment where they’re taking ticket sizes from 15k to 100 thousands... (...) We deployed very small ticket sizes from one kg, 1,000 dollars, to \$50,000. But our average is the normal ticket sizes are between five to 10 thousands.” (ESO#7)</p> <p>“We had a bootcamp, we invited them to come from all those countries with the diagnostics to identify the key challenges in their in their growth.” (ESO#7)</p> <p>“We have two of those businesses that are actually one is going through the <i>(omitted, a local financial institution, note of the authors)</i> acceleration program, but we are doing the consult work with them to help them set up system, because the money coming from <i>(omitted, a local financial institution, note of the authors)</i> they’re going to be mismanaged if you don’t have assistance.(...) So is giving them the money. But we also offer technical assistance. So through the technical assistance, we’re building systems, for example, we set for them KPIs, they will set tools where we track the financial activities.” (ESO#7)</p> <p>“So for all the programs we do, they blend training. The training can either be more of one on one on what we prefer to call tailored business advisory, or cohort-based trainings.” (ESO#9)</p> <p>“We do seed funding where resources allow, we also do capacity building trainings in different areas.” (ESO#10)</p> <p>“And then we do also seed funding. (...) So for the big ones, 50-60, the small ones 10-20. Those sometimes you can go to 5000, depending on the ask of the innovator, and if it’s actually an innovation.” (ESO#10)</p> <p>“The whole idea about impact investment is that it was born out of realising that the available financing structures, which were mainly led by banks and microfinance, were unable to solve what is called the missing middle. These are clients whose financing needs are too big for microfinance. But at the same time, they are ineligible for commercial banking and finance.” (ESO#11)</p> <p>“What we’re doing now and acceleration program, it’s quite a small seed funding what they get it’s only about \$500. (...) So we tell them: this is to help you to basically do your marketing go out to see your customers do your customer interviews.” (ESO#12)</p> <p>“I can do so many trainings (...) but these guys will only learn the right mindset through doing. That’s why we’re focusing more on business development services based on their need.” (ESO#13)</p> <p>“We introduce you to a potential investor (...) we get what we call a success fee for startups, startups, because it’s too expensive for them to pay for the incubator and accelerator.” (ESO #13)</p>

“So if you are unable to pay us, then maybe we can do we can acquire a certain percentage of your business which eventually can buy back.” (ESO#14)

“We start to collect data on them, we get them connected to our online marketplace that they can start selling, and you start to understand what their revenues look like, what kind of materials they are purchasing through that marketplace, and how much they’re spending. (...) And then we can start see trends. And as we start to see issues, we can start to provide injections of programming to help them solve those issues.” (ESO#15)

“We don’t look at the mission of the enterprise. We just look on the tracks (...) recently we were trying to grow a portfolio in women led businesses because we want to focus on our passion for growing women businesses. Just to create an impact in that space and balance our portfolio on a gender basis.” (ESO#16)

“We hope that we can have an internal fund which is pulled in from different donors and the bank, which gives entrepreneurs. Credits or grants, mostly credits because there’s still a very big gap with giving credit to entrepreneurs because of their risk (...) It would be through partnerships, key partnerships with key players.” (ESO#18)

Transform support systems through platforms

“But also, we want people to know about their businesses. So we give them a platform: I mean, we open their market and business. Social media platform to promote products.” (ESO#1)

“We have seen solutions that can built bold engagement with the community, and it is built with that model, even physically but largely grounded on technology platform. And then, there are those who use directly technology platform: and the communities have adopted such platforms.” (ESO#1)

“We’re currently in the process of developing an online database for locating people, and if an entrepreneur is looking for someone, you can see someone who is near you. So we are doing a bit of work in there.” (ESO#3)

“We give the support. We give them distribution plans, we have some trucks to help them we help them to take their products to exposures and the exhibitions. They can get market so we do train them of course, that we will offer support to go to markets. (...) We have e-commerce channels, those who already can give to “Jumia”. Other youth ecommerce platforms where they can start ready, we have a lot of expos in different parts of the country credit solutions.” (ESO#5)

“Now, we are actually building systems that can allow us to have much more information about start-ups and actors around. (...) we are reviewing their basic financial statements, the records they have and then compare with their bank statement and then we have that modest financial information which enable to make clearer investments.” (ESO#7)

“How do we keep up with improving and making businesses more efficient, and the answer for us is to build systems. So this is this can be this can be a web interface, this for example, where companies can access, get materials and content. It can be an application that they can use to get financing and all that kind of stuff. So for us, it’s really just looking at the future and seeing how we can systemize interventions.” (ESO#9)

“Training is the easiest. And that’s why in one of our largest programs (...) we’ve gone through the digitizing the training.” (ESO#13)

AGGREGATE 2nd order themes	<i>1st order codes</i> Representative quotations
	<p>“We are creating a single platform where every member is profiled, and their information are on the platform. So at any time, you want to use the services of these people, it becomes very easier for you to (...) do an exchange, make an appointment, (...) start communicating and do business amongst themselves. Or they can now have an opportunity to share more information, knowledge or even opportunities whatsoever through the platform.” (ESO#14)</p> <p>“We have digital platforms, which we utilise, to try and connect all the different creative and cottage industry entrepreneurs around the country to one main hub. And so that was like our main market access point.” (ESO#15)</p> <p>“The virtual factory network we created, enables to connect all these creative entrepreneurs together in a systemic way. And then long term, we want to be able to provide access to finance and credit through that, as a systemic platform.” (ESO#15)</p> <p>“We’re also building a marketplace around that for inputs and raw materials so that people can go to one centralized location on an app or a website and be able to actually purchase the things that they need.” (ESO#15)</p> <p>“We advise investors using different asset classes. So, we’re building out different asset classes that are providing a platform for investment in Africa.” (ESO#17)</p> <p>“We have a community of practice where we share best practice, and it is an online platform, (...) So you could have physical meetings or online meetings, but at least we know that it is a platform where we may create exchange.” (ESO#19)</p> <p>“We use an app that reference your startups, opportunities, and so on.” (ESO#21)</p> <p>“So, we do capacity building, we do policy advocacy and then we also provide an investment platforms for our members. And here we try to bring in various investors.” (ESO#23)</p>
<i>Influencing the top and bottom of the ecosystem</i>	<p><i>Advocacy to influence government</i></p> <p>“Part of the work in the last year was really getting on board the government people and corporate people and understand looking: what’s in your hand, from the 2023? What are you going into act in, what are the results that you want to see? And bringing that back to students.” (ESO#1)</p> <p>“The government has just finalised the BDS framework. We participated actively in that process. But that BDS framework highlights the direction that should be followed by BDS providers, if they’re to do so... those are things which I think are changing slowly, but they’re changing.” (ESO#3)</p> <p>“We start to realize that the industry has needs that academia can fill, yeah, for example, someone needs that the industry, they have a challenge, and then they informed the academia, and then the two can be able to design a solution, and then they take to the industry to test and improve, then they have it actually deployed to serve the industry. So that’s how the business incubation came in.” (ESO#4)</p> <p>“[Talking about partners, note of the authors], we are trying to see how all our directions can merge to this one. So, it’s a tough job, but there is an effort.” (ESO#3)</p> <p>“The fish needs to jump from the pool into the lake. And all the actors need to be very intentional about that.” (ESO#7)</p> <p>“Convening is where we bring different ecosystem players around a common cause.” (ESO#10)</p> <p>“We are trying to inform government to try to create awareness around startup and what they can do for them.” (ESO#23)</p>

“We are trying to bring them closer to us, I mean bring the government officials closer (...) but also, we are trying to work with them. For example, with our parent ministry, which is still ICT, we’re trying to see how we can subsidize Internet costs for our members.” (ESO#23)

“We deal also with issues of operations in terms of the operating cost of doing business. And here we are looking at things like Internet, most of them operate on the web, did you make Internet available to them? So, ask government for subsidies.” (ESO#23)

“We also do policy advocacy. And right now, we are working on a Startup Act. Which is going to help us to see how best we can create an enabling environment for the setup ecosystem.” (ESO#23)

Developing long-term mindsets and real business ownership

“A lot of value in every test methodology takes on a bigger view, transformation approach. So it’s at the heart of those abilities to kind of see how, how can you open entrepreneur to identify their entrepreneurial behaviours? How can you optimise by directly entrepreneur behaviours, and how would you help them on the journey? Pursuing is rated up to new behaviours. (...) So we don’t do a lot of work on the environment the entrepreneurs deal in some of the ecosystem players, a strawman policy and support on the best cost structure. Our core business is really to help the entrepreneur himself.” (ESO #3)

“Empretec is now six days training focuses on what you call the 10 behavioural competencies of an entrepreneur, those are called “Personal Entrepreneurial Competencies”, PECs, and those PECs is what the training is about, it is about recognition of those PECs, it’s about how to adopt prospects.” (ESO#3)

“What we believe one of the core messages in our you know, in our training is that when you choose to be an entrepreneur, you choose to take responsibility for your decision. And you need to remember that whatever you decide to do, in essence, you have made a decision. And when you make a decision, that means that you have to deal with the repercussions of your decision. And some of the repercussions are not very exciting repercussions. So, repercussions, like the results of your decision. We spend a lot of time sharing that you have to deal with what has resulted in. Well, what is the result of this? Of The circumstances? So we do that.” (ESO#3)

“We want to say that we need entrepreneurs to know that there is a right way to run a business. And that right way has been researched, it has been people have tried it and it works. And then we need to make sure that information becomes common knowledge to the broader part of the citizen of the country. So, for us, that’s really what we’re attempting to do. Now, that process, we think, as an institution, we can’t do alone. We know that for sure. But we also believe that it’s a process, which takes a long time, we think the narrative is changing. But we think it’s changes very slowly.” (ESO#3)

“And skilling means building those systems where our approach in training is (...) we will train you that you will be able to do this on your own. (...) You need to have the self-drive (...) As a business leader, you need to know every single information in your business, because you cannot make a decision as a business leader if you don’t know!” (ESO#7)

“They keep telling us: ‘We need money to buy that!’ and we said ‘No, you don’t need money to buy, man! You need money to rent’ (...) you don’t need land at this stage, you need to rent. This is how we are trying to break the mentality. (...) And then they start seeing themselves different.” (ESO#8)

“We are doing a kind of education and with time they realise that it’s better to do the long term planning, it’s better to put money into other investments, diversify, all these things are those that they develop while in both classes.” (ESO#8)

“Because they have been poor, they have been poor for a long time in their life, generationally, he doesn’t even know what living out of poverty is like. It’s so you need to change that mindset before you even worry about the money (...) Either you give someone money or give someone knowledge, the knowledge is better than the money because the knowledge will create money. That’s our effort!” (ESO#11)

“We teach these businesses to come up with business models that are financially viable, models that refer to generation of profits (...) They need to understand how to cost products, such that you’re able to add a markup, a profit margin, that is going to be sufficient enough for you to pay your costs, operating costs, and also meet your obligations. So you’re in charge of your business” (ESO#11)

“It takes time to build this culture of businesses. And that’s why we have accelerators. That’s why we have investment readiness programs, the trainings (...) to impact the knowledge of costing, (...) cash management, cash flow management, (...) reporting.” (ESO#11)

“We are discussing maybe to give a loan instead of grants at very early stage to change their approach.” (ESO#12)

“The success fees and all these experiments are coming from to try and build a culture here where businesses expect to pay. You shouldn’t think you’re just going to walk in here and walk out with a free service.” (ESO#13)

“We’re trying to change those mindsets and stereotypes (...) You have to make a time investment or a month to go through our Business Academy and come up with a business plan, then every company that comes in gives us an option to get 6% from them. And that’s, again to change this mindset of free money. And you know, everything comes at a cost.” (ESO#13)

“This lady made \$1,000 in her first year. And then last year, she was able to make like \$10,000. (...) When she first came in, we help change that mindset: you can do so much more than you can imagine if you just work at it every single day.” (ESO#15)

“We have like in house Hackathons, community activities: they’re really goal is to keep on such an open conversation that motivates and shows that inside practices, that things don’t happen overnight, that I am struggling with, like financing models, or my legal framework.” (ESO#16)

“We help them preparing their forecasts. So you have to be prepare for anything that may come along, you need to plan for it and see how it can impact on your financials. So most of them do not take that into account. Maybe they’ll plan for a fixed interest rate, and they do not look at any changes.” (ESO#17)

“For example, to go beyond necessity we invest in food (...) so when you come to the training without breakfast, we can also get food so you’re not struggle to look for money to eat this time (...) and also, through this organisation they learn different skills then we ask them: how can your new skills be valuable already to make some money?” (ESO#19)

“There’s a cultural issue among certain entrepreneurs, of depending on grants, and largely also among their communities. And we are trying as ecosystem builder to change something by creating awareness (...) there’s limited awareness that entrepreneurs should be sustainable on their own.” (ESO#22)

“The entrepreneurs that are willing to see their business get to the next level, should be also willing to be committed to the growth of this business, including being able to pay for some of these services (...) So that’s why our services are not free. Because for us, it’s also a level of ensuring commitment, (...) We want to be able to see that commitment, and it comes from that percentage that is paid, highly subsidized still, but we want to see that commitment.” (ESO#22)

STAGNATING ENTREPRENEURIAL SUPPORT ECOSYSTEM

AGGREGATE 2 nd order themes	1 st order codes Representative quotations
ESOs isolation, competition & dependency	<p><i>ESOs consider themselves silos</i></p> <p>“They brought us together a number of the incubation centres, and the purpose was to see what programs we are running. And how can we synergize as opposed to ESO#4 doing its own, Startup Hub doing their own. Yeah. But it didn’t stand for some time... But then I also have found recent (<i>omitted, an international governmental organization, note of the authors</i>), wants to do something where they can an incubation Association. Yeah. But I’ve not got more details (...) I’m not working with the (<i>omitted, an international governmental organization, note of the authors</i>). We don’t get any information...” (ESO #4)</p> <p>“We have not really taken time to identify our areas of synergy to work together because they should be areas of synergy, where ESO#4 is strong in these areas, and ESO#2 is strong in the other and there is an incubation centre up here in the university for science incubation centre. So we have not taken time to check areas of synergy.” (ESO#4)</p> <p>“I think there’s more of us working in silos. Yeah, each entity is working at doing things on their own. So you don’t really want to come together...” (ESO#4)</p> <p>“There is a lot of benefits. Because if we are energy and food incubation, is in food. And then the (<i>omitted, a Ugandan research institute, note of the authors</i>) is the other technologies, ESO#2 they are good in that technology like IT, they are areas of synergy, but none of us has come out to get those.” (ESO#4)</p> <p>“So in a lot of times when they reach out and say let’s collaborate on this, where we think it’s asleep, and put a lot of pressure on us. And actually, we’re trying to limit our collaboration with other system actors. (...) We want to limit it because (...) We think it’s difficult. Sometimes it’s going to divert us from where we want to be.” (ESO#7)</p> <p>“Their funders gave them money ... millions of dollars! So, I think I think they’re the best funded in the country right now. So, they don’t need anyone else, they don’t see the need to, to sit and talk!” (ESO#8)</p> <p>“They have also reached out we’ve had conversations they’ve loved what we are planning to do. And they think that it’s it would be a good fit for us to get into a relationship with (<i>omitted, a multinational corporation, note of the authors</i>), on the other hand, has not given us enough time. Because they seem to have signed a longer-term deal with ESO#24.” (ESO#8)</p> <p>“The ecosystem is very competitive. But that means it’s very what’s the word like disintegrated? If I can say was actually clustered. You’ll find like a certain group of ecosystem actors work together. Well, another group works together well. And these groups don’t connect.” (ESO#10)</p> <p>“Even in ESO#23 there’re like clusters, you’ll find that maybe innovation village, and maybe ESO#7 or ESO#1, and other ESOs, like there are groups in there, and all. So just like, having, bringing people to give a for a common cause can really be difficult.” (ESO#10)</p> <p>“We need to work with all of them most times, which is difficult, like bringing them together (...) we had that initiative, I was talking about open source for equality. We needed to work with so many, like different NGOs who wanted to. How can we be developers connecting with NGOs? So maybe support organisations that are working with developers, it would be nice to bring them on board with this initiative. But not all of them are working together. So you find that you end up working with just one? Because there’s no good relationship.” (ESO#10)</p> <p>“The idea of collaboration came about because of fragmentation. Everyone is doing this thing. But they’re not speaking to each other.” (ESO#13)</p>

“First disintegrated. All support organisations are like a close. They do various activities and will never be able to connect to the others.” (ESO#14)

“So that is still new within the ecosystem to find areas of collaboration and implement those. Because again, we run them as private businesses in some way, everyone for itself.” (ESO#16)

“On a daily basis, I see so many accelerators working in silos. (...) I mean by yourself. For example, I’m ESO#22. I’ll do everything you know, instead of coming together as ecosystem builders to support the entrepreneurs, we prefer to just be by ourselves.” (ESO#22)

“They will continue operating in silos because they feel they are big. They’re very big. (...) Because they are already getting a lot of funding.” (ESO#23)

“If you’re going to go alone, you will be going back to your silos and then they will support you alone. The government will support you alone instead of supporting the bigger crowd.” (ESO#23)

“We feel like nobody understands what we do. So it’s better to (...) do my organisation by myself (...) And it’s easier to find people abroad aware of it, (...) It is maybe just a mentality thing, but now we feel isolated in Kampala.” (ESO#29)

ESOs perceive themselves in competition

“I can say we are competing in terms of accessing resources to support.” (ESO#6)

“You’re competing for enterprises that you that you’re supporting.” (ESO#9)

“There is competition in which they’re [ESOs, note of the authors] a bit selfish. (...) There are other different players who are all trying to say that they are the best.” (ESO#8)

“So for whatever support you reach out to (*omitted, a multinational corporation, note of the authors*) for your you pass through ESO#24, and we might not have much success since ESO#24 sees us as one of the competitors, rather than a collaborate.” (ESO#8)

“It’s quite challenging, especially for the locally founded companies, the survival, the difficulty to access capital, the difficulty to do what you’re asking me that building the partnerships, the competition that you have to face because right now we have a lot of European and US based interventions coming in a lot of organisations coming in. Also looking at SMEs. You have large corporations also like bugs doing their own incubator and accelerator. So, it’s very competitive.” (ESO#9)

“We have the Uganda ecosystem builders’ group and many have ESO#23, Uganda entrepreneurial ecosystem initiative, different clusters have come up. But the challenge has is the has been that most of the Enterprise Support Organisations look at themselves as competition. When people look at themselves as competition And then the data sharing becomes very hard.” (ESO#9)

“These I think ego. I don’t know if this personal. Maybe be for misunderstanding, I don’t know. But for some reason, some people just don’t connect.” (ESO#10)

“The hubs are failing to see where the collaboration is (...) we perceived to be competition among each other. (...) In a way left us all fighting for the attention of the same people, the start-ups’ founders.” (ESO#16)

“We can only share a small component of our network in the ecosystem, because it’s a competition.” (ESO#16)

“Maybe we’ll have the ecosystem talking. (...) it takes you a few years that you build trust, because you’re coming from a few years of not collaborating at all because of competition.” (ESO#16)

AGGREGATE	<i>1st order codes</i>
2nd order themes	Representative quotations

“Even when there’s an umbrella like ESO#23, you have a lot of work to make trust, because we still see each other’s in competition. Why? because we have a very private sector mindset.” (ESO#16)

“We all go to the same people, we’re all going to mask the cat, (...) And until we don’t know how to present a united front, we’ll still feel like I need to go and show *(omitted, a multinational corporation, note of the authors)* what I’m doing so that they may found me.” (ESO#16)

“The majority of them don’t want to share their information or they don’t want to release information because they fear that, maybe they’re going be stolen (...) So there is that lack of trust and mistrust among the members.” (ESO#23)

Grant dependency of ESOs

“What did not change since I was here in that line I think that was the business as idea, but how to keep is sustainable, so now we watch for grants and financing.” (ESO#1)

“And certainly, as I think by the time you go through the different incubators across Africa that you meet, whether it’s an incubator accelerator, they, there is no profitable model for them. Okay, there’s no self-sustaining model for them. However, and it’s because they have always looked at themselves, or we have already looked at ourselves as sorry, as (...) we like an NGO (...) I said in the beginning, most of these incubators, don’t have that business approach to the way they function, they have an NGO approach.” (ESO#1)

“Also, because this whole grant ecosystem here. So firstly, it can’t grow beyond the size of grants, right, because they usually come up to a certain stage and not any more than, but also, they spoil a lot of companies.” (ESO#2)

“We need more funding into the ecosystem, so that organisations can be sustainable (...) we need to get to a point where the ecosystem players can be able to fully dedicate their time. One of the challenges now ecosystem is most people who are in the ecosystem. Are there as a side gig, they can’t fully... and it’s a fact of funding.” (ESO#3)

“They need someone to come in and cover the cost. Yeah. So that’s how we always started with the grant funding to be able to, (...) they can be able to come in and someone can bring a document, and they can print, they can access internet, you have a boardroom, they can come and do business meetings from here. Yes, but we are covering the cost. So we apply for funding.” (ESO#4)

“My key role here is to focus on sustainability of ESO#4. So I actually write grant proposals to various and that would be actually got funding, the majority from the Norwegian entities.” (ESO#4)

“We’ve had programs were the results based financing opportunities for entrepreneurs to go and produce, improved cookstoves and take them to a refugee settlement. Those people don’t have the money to buy. So you have the money to produce (...) but at some point the market cannot afford. So, you’ll find that some of these active allows us grants and the entrepreneurs make stoves and then the other company organisations are able to distribute in their communities.” (ESO#4)

“We are not open all the year that you can just come in. We specifically have a time when we do a call based on the financing available. And then we get entrepreneurs on board based on the funding terms that we have with our financing with our funders.” (ESO#4)

“Our business need funds to deploy (...) So we have a few partners (...) we share the contacts with them and initiate the discussions with them.” (ESO#11)

“The hub implementing model is very grant-based.” (ESO#16)

“The only way we offset those particular training fees or whatever is through sourcing other funding partners.” (ESO#18)

AGGREGATE 2 nd order themes	1 st order codes Representative quotations
	<p>“We used to run directly incubation services and we used to get funding through training mainly offered to NGOs. (...) Then in a moment, all these grants went down. (...) So we have to restart. (...) Then they stopped to fund us and we changed type of services.” (ESO#21)</p> <p>“Many of them, if their funders pulled out, they would close (...) because many of them are just relying on grants, so they have projects that are time bound.” (ESO#22)</p> <p>“Most accelerators think so desperate over the numbers, they just need to come up and say we trained 100 people. So the quantity versus the quality.” (ESO#22)</p> <p>“So once the funding is finished, then the program will also end.” (ESO#23)</p>
<i>Start-ups’ stagnation</i>	<p><i>Start-ups are dependent on support or grants</i></p> <p>“This situation leads to the fact that once you burned the grant there’s no way that your profits will be able to cover your costs. So, what’s the only option to raise more grants until you make it, maybe, eventually, but probably not. Right?” (ESO#2)</p> <p>“I’ve seen that dozens of times basically, good ideas die because they get too much grant money.” (ESO#2)</p> <p>“It’s certainly there are entrepreneurs that either don’t either see the value of incubation or it could be expensive for them to get into, and they scale free money around.” (ESO#4)</p> <p>“We need to stop creating silos where businesses move from ESO#7 program to Annabelle program.” (ESO#7)</p> <p>“Case in point those kids (<i>omitted, a Ugandan unicorn, note of the authors</i>). it was a very different idea from what was then for solving a real problem. But even, where they have reached, they realise that their financial model was probably not sustainable, the long-term. Because initially, they offered, everyone rides at subsidised prices, because they were getting money from investors. Yeah. Then when the investors stopped putting in money, then the business struggles. So we still have a lot of issues that are unresolved when it comes to how much support is enterprise actually getting.” (ESO#8)</p> <p>“Then they can set up their own facilities have their own machinery, but still remain a community of Entrepreneurs. So keep the benefit without incubation. (...) There is no motivation! There was one that was sopping up big hotels. And they were still incubated. There was no I’m doing yoga sutras in all the big supermarkets. And still incubated! (...) In this case, you reach a stage you get out like you’re in beds.” (ESO#8)</p> <p>“If we continue to rely on grant or donors, we will not see the zeal in the entrepreneur to grow their business to be a commercially successful even without support.” (ESO#17)</p> <p>“You find that start-ups will move from our hub to another. (...) Today they get this service from us. Tomorrow they get the other service from another actor. (...) they will get a funding from our hub, and then they go to another hub and get another funding from there.” (ESO#23)</p> <p><i>Start-ups don’t grow</i></p> <p>“Most of these remain with the seed funding, I struggle with the game they could get, they could win a competition somewhere, they get some other grant somewhere, they’re looking at an enterprise that from the incubation, someone can see that it’s a good business that they can be able to come in as a shareholder.” (ESO#4)</p>

AGGREGATE	<i>1st order codes</i>
2nd order themes	Representative quotations

“Why the entrepreneur will not move from this pool is a failure for the support institutions to understand that they cannot do everything for that person startup. (...) you can deal with an entrepreneur for two years, and they’re not moving out, because you want to attempt to do everything, given where he was not kept.” (ESO#6)
 “We realise many of the businesses that come through our acceleration programs, or the training program, especially early stage businesses were struggling to have access to finance. Now, these businesses, when they go to formal financial institutions, they will ask them for one call that things they don’t have.” (ESO#7)
 “They don’t know that holding a lot of money with grants for a long time is affecting their cash flows and so they don’t grow.” (ESO#11)
 “The ecosystem in itself has so many challenges. For examples, we don’t have a lot of exits in the market in terms of unicorn companies, yet there’s so many hubs, that means that there’s a quality issue.” (ESO#16)
 “Those grants are going to help you to get out of the ground. But after that, if you’re going to rely on grants, you’re just going to stumble. You won’t scale fast. Because then you’ve tagged your revenues and your thought process just receiving grants, you become almost a donor fatigue entity. It doesn’t really help you to grow.” (ESO#17)
 “So when it comes to the programs, if you do short term program, it’s a problem because you cannot push startup to grow enough.” (ESO#28)

FLOURISHING ENTREPRENEURIAL SUPPORT ECOSYSTEM

System of support and sustainable opportunities	<i>From system of relationships to opportunities for ESOs</i>
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“Everyone who comes into our catalyser program comes through recommendations or through our website. Like we don’t need marketing, communication. No, not at all.” (ESO#2)
 “But a lot has changed. Ecosystem players are talking more we have WhatsApp groups of people in the ecosystem, versus “I have an entrepreneur looking for this that someone knows”. So, I think that it is but there’s still a lot of room. (...) before we didn’t know each other. And we were not attempting to move as a unit.” (ESO#3)
 “[ESOs] have done enough to work as a blog. Now that’s another step in the right direction.” (ESO#3)
 “We are in good working relations with the industry associations. Yes, most of the opportunities actually come through the association. (...) Other support entities, other business incubators and other support entities that we are in contact with because in our network, we share the opportunities with them so they can share their opportunities with their current or previous beneficiaries.” (ESO#4)
 “When the incubators have opportunities to benefit companies, they actually share those opportunities with the other incubators, so to automatically goes to your enterprises. So find that an enterprise has bought a machine from ESO#4. The same enterprise, I guess, has got a training from ESO#2, and they go and get, you know, funding from the competition from outside something like that. So entrepreneurs have benefited from more than one of the incubators” (ESO#4).
 “This collaboration is usually as a result of relationships, we all relate at different levels, for instance, I am from a government institution, I relate to different businesses, different set of partners. If I’m from the private sector, I may relate to a different set of partners. And all those ones are bringing you different kinds of resources, networks, or linkages.” (ESO#6)
 “At least interconnectivity. Even if not sequential as such, but the interconnectedness. If you’re interconnected, I believe the entrepreneur can move faster. And they, they might leave the pool and go to the lake.” (ESO#6)

“We don’t look at any of them as competitors rather than collaborators. We believe that we will go further if we collaborate in our ecosystem. So we try as much as possible (...) So that we can have conversations to ones, how better we can collaborate, how we can co-create projects, programs, that will be beneficial to all entrepreneurs.” (ESO#8)

“We will work with ESO#23, because you know, that network is focusing on very many organisations in the private sector, who have never gone to the humanitarian response.” (ESO#10)

“Referral system is basically the point. If we are working with a consortium or other partners, (...) if they have a convener on grounds, they can help us to point out which ecosystem actors are there. If they are working in that area, maybe they’ve done a convener or an event and let us know.” (ESO#10)

“The other way to enlarge our network are referrals from other network funds (...) and also, we’ve been scaling with recommendations from existing clients. He does work with us, then he recommends a friend, business partner, colleague...” (ESO#11)

“How do we build this network? Your reputation? In two ways. One is that there is a history where many of the font took management people you went to school with, so you have a historical friendship (...). The other one is also in these conferences that I told you about where people come together, all the funds also come to fish from (...) so, you also network with them and synergize with them.” (ESO#11)

“We build our ecosystem through contacts. We build it through referrals, referrals of businesses of individuals that we have probably financed, (...) We used to advertise or calling for application.” (ESO#11)

“It comes with experience. So the more you do, the more it brings in more. We’re starting to focus in on programs very early. So we build expertise to quickly implement and deploy. So that really also helps, I believe, the opportunity to come, to tap into that connectedness with others and being a very attractive piece.” (ESO#13)

“So, we build a community around ourselves, and we keep referring back to our pipeline and encouraging to portray apply for new things.” (ESO#13)

“We’ve established partnerships with hubs in Amsterdam, with hubs in the UK. And that alone would bring a lot of easy access to market that we can leverage.” (ES #16)

“Good people are attractive, so a lot of our tenants have been through our tenants and those recommendations.” (ESO#16)

“We collect entrepreneurs’ through our personal networks, secondly, it’s incubations and hubs, and being the judge in competitions to see different companies pitching. It’s word of mouth (...) we don’t do a lot of advertising because then you have so many opportunities coming in that you cannot be able to select.” (ESO#17)

“Most of the time really is about building trust with one person and then through this individual connect to foundations connect to other organisations, for partnerships or agency. Also, within the local communities.” (ESO#19)

“Some startups come through referrals, or even some of the events that you’re participating, where you work as mentor (...) So we’ve found some opportunities from such events.” (ESO#17)

“Many times, we find new partners through our beneficiaries. (...) like mouth to mouth.” (ESO#19)

“Startups get referred to us because we have a history, so a lot of them get referred to us via the networks.” (ESO#21)

“We build our clients by using our network. And we get referrals from our networks as well. We also get referrals from our networks on demand in the same way that we would refer someone to another organisation in the network.” (ESO#21)

ESOs actively respond to challenges of the society

“So as a space, you know, as Hive it’s just logical that the question then becomes, how do you partner with young people to deliver value for themselves? Because Fast forward five years, 10 years down the line, whatever. value comes out of all these acceleration programs, it’s for these young people.” (ESO#1)

“Because startup grows and is able to hire or create jobs for 15 people. It’s 15 people, five years from now that would ideally not have a job. So Hive then becomes very crucial as that space that creates a big playground for all these young people. So the goal is not to say, here is the problem across the country.” (ESO#1)

“Entrepreneurs are at frontline of the social development for Uganda. So, our school of thought is that if one entrepreneur can create 10 jobs, then you are solving societal issues. Now the question is, how do you have one entrepreneur to be able to create 10 jobs? We create such entrepreneur, to tackle unemployment.” (ESO#3)

“We think to that transformation: an entrepreneur is a person who can kind of transform not just their lives and their families but transform their communities through their businesses. And we are convinced that if we don’t invest in that person, then whatever else we’re investing, we won’t be able to get into the dividend.” (ESO#3)

“First of all, employment for their community members. Simply many of these steps, paying taxes, which is a big thing, many of them, many of them, active citizens in their communities, in terms of some support in terms of things like education, things like just social services, many of them are active citizens, but I think for us, what is even more important the fact that we have shipped off one person from the country’s (...) if you talk to anyone who honestly tell you, the challenge here is we have a very young population that has no opportunity.” (ESO#3)

“As ESO#7, our goals is focus on agricultural sector. And I mean, agriculture employs about I think 60% or 70% payable to people in Uganda. (...) There are many people involved in agriculture. So if you’re looking at the impact of investment in agriculture is huge because it touches so many people. (...) We’re also looking at manufacturing, which is which is, which is coming as one of those very key sectors in Uganda. And then also financial services did a bit of financial inclusion. We be supporting some businesses in the financial sector service, and also health care, right. Now, if you look at those, those key focus areas, they have a lot of impact like, yeah, if you successfully scaled the business that they enter, the impact on employment is going to be high.” (ESO#7)

“It’s called agriculture impact investment facility. So, this is a facility that support a female lead agri-businesses, okay. By female lead, we mean that the company is gender inclusive.” (ESO#9)

“We have a program of entrepreneurs with disabilities. This is working with entrepreneurs that have disabilities, we did find a training toolkit that’s up supports them to replicate businesses and work with successful entrepreneurs.” (ESO#9)

“Also now like in Uganda, or but generally in the world, most ecosystem support organisations, Will. They’re not focusing in the humanitarian response. Yeah. So that was a gap that was identified.” (ESO#10)

“Our work is giving impact funds to improve livelihoods (...) giving those loans is just the vehicle that helps us achieve this destination.” (ESO#11)

“We used to have an initiative called outbox Ed, for education, (...) where the focus was on upskilling young people who are making the transition from school to work. So trying to solve that talent gap of software engineers, and seeing how this kind of help young people we can transition into decent work.” (ESO#13)

“We don’t look at the mission of the enterprise. We just look on the tracks (...) recently we were trying to grow a portfolio in women led businesses because we want to focus on our passion for growing women businesses. Just to create an impact in that space and balance our portfolio on a gender basis.” (ESO#17)

“Those business are profitable. So for us to grow our own country, and this is where I think we have the passion for, we have to grow internally even to make a return, we have to help our people grow as well. And we will not be able to change our nation if we don’t do it ourselves internally.” (ESO#17)

“We actually pushed a model to foster local empowerment, it’s very essential! (...) Individuals who come from difficult backgrounds pass through the program, and really get to know themselves better, and get a network of supports. (...) We empower them, but also push them to change the society, and other refugees in settlements.” (ESO#19)

“When you give jobs, you’re changing lives. When you’re able to pay bills, you’re changing lives. (...) we have to push businesses that are growing, we are the changemakers, with the businesspeople are the change makers of this community. So if we are all going to be poor, who is going to change lives? We usually say entrepreneurship and solving problems for profits. So I’m using the profits to solve problems of society.” (ESO#23)

ESOs are able to reach the end-user and the remote areas

“Reach village entrepreneurs, that they haven’t reached them yet, but it’s not very clear to how to reach them yet, and neither how to discover them. Remember: I did country drives, every quarter I go to the country just to discover people...” (ESO#1)

“They’re there but they usually not engaged in the ecosystem. So we bring them ecosystem into ecosystem. Yeah, and receive the necessary support as well.” (ESO#9)

“I mean, in my view, that’s what you should aim for. Because they’re growing, the number of these spaces keeps going. Yeah. Because like I said, exposure also is an opportunity, people are able to set up these types of spaces out of these highly urban areas, which is a good thing. I think the next layer to that should be now niche focused, to see if there’s an accelerator and incubator in a refugee settlement area. These are the services that it offers, that if you came to Kampala, into a space in Kampala, you may not find those services. Yeah. Because the community in Kampala is different from the community in a refugee area.” (ESO#1)

“I can pay a fair price, for looks if we guarantee a good market the middleman would never buy at a lower price. So we ensure that no one can pay an unfair price. (...) Then the winner is the poor person at the end.” (ESO#5)

“We work with farmer organisations, community based organisation. Yeah, regulating shredded mangoes kind of, the avocados, the bananas and coffee. (...) Go up there, to train them on the production, we even do commitment trainings, that, we go out in the community and train farmers train for doing different products.” (ESO#5)

“If I’m to look at it, especially on the end for the innovators that we support. We, we want to like to go on ground in the rural areas. Yeah. So not just working with organisations, or innovations that are maybe located in the cities.” (ESO#10)

AGGREGATE 2 nd order themes	1 st order codes Representative quotations
<i>Flourishing development of start-ups and communities</i>	<p>“We visited the companies, periodically we visit the companies physically see exactly what is on the ground. And then interact one on one with them to actually come up with solutions.” (ESO#11)</p> <p>“We want the government to understand what the effect that we can bring to the economy and then we are able to, you know, to go on with that. So right now we have a consultant that’s in the field that’s working on an impact assessment.” (ESO#23)</p> <p><i>Design of post-support programs for start-ups</i></p> <p>“We usually we assess the businesses that are going through our program. We send them a survey to see if they find the program helpful, we follow up the businesses and so. We stay in touch with them to make sure that they’re doing ok.” (ESO#1)</p> <p>“What is the purpose of such visits? Accountability mainly, and also know that we’re beating the target of the program. Also know if they’re working to getting the fundings.” (ESO#1)</p> <p>“We stay in touch with them, follow up, visiting, if out of town we schedule appointment.” (ESO#1)</p> <p>“After program we don’t just let them go. We provide space for them, consultancy, financial advice to keep books, internet. So, we do provide access and support after the program.” (ESO#1)</p> <p>“One of the things which we try to do is to keep in touch with our, with our entrepreneurs, even when projects end, we attempt to keep in touch, it’s expensive to do it but we try.” (ESO#3)</p> <p>“Now being in Business Acceleration, because we realise that when the entrepreneur is supported in the business incubation phase, when they go out what we would call the post, business incubation phase, some actually derail some collapse. Some, of course, go past that. But normally, those are a few. Yeah, so we are now doing business acceleration so that they can be able to survive that phase. And then after the incubation, yes, then get to that growth stage.” (ESO#4)</p> <p>“Like after the pilot, for after the scale up, we do a check in with them, it could be either a phone call, or we could maybe send someone on ground physically just to find out how they are progressing.” (ESO #10)</p> <p>“We know that for an organisation goes through like different iterations when it’s scaling up or piloting. Can we keep them in our loop? So that there’s possibility for them to get support from us just not once? (...) building relationship, check on their progress. Yeah. Because we know that that scaling up and piloting for them to even break even, it might take some of them like three, four years.” (ESO#10)</p> <p>“The time to upgrade is between one and three years along the way. Depending on our business for growing, we are their marketing development partner, we are leaving them up to the other hubs if they’re right for that, we’re leaving them up with the accelerators you know, so we don’t wait for three years if they can now go... Now for those who are keen to grow their businesses, there’s always every year a lot of opportunity for them to get out.” (ESO#5)</p> <p>“Number two, post investment, we train them to strengthen their financial management systems, internal control systems. Inside some cases, we also provide the accounting software, you know, for them to have better reporting systems and things like that.” (ESO#11)</p> <p>“We usually have meetings with them to update us on the progress of their business activities when they’re working with us to give them trainings.” (ESO#17)</p>

AGGREGATE	<i>1st order codes</i>
2nd order themes	Representative quotations

“So, one of the things that we do for follow up after the trainings, we do organize networking events. We called it incubator community events. We have different alumni from the different cohorts we have trained over the years. They come in and talk with each other. (...) we also let them exhibit their products and their services.” (ESO#18)

“Our coaching and mentorship is available for the people that go through the trainings for a period of at least nine months. So, in those nine months, they have an interaction one-on-one with our trainers or peer-coaching, and this also helps them to keep within the community.” (ESO#18)

“The thing we offer them now is a Wednesday Business Surgery. Every Wednesday you have a business surgery, so it’s free consultancy, basically, and they can contact us so it’s about half an hour per client. So we offer that other ones. (...) So any problems they brought in any issues that we can resolve on the poll or through a WhatsApp chat group.” (ESO#21)

“They didn’t get to win the money during the competition but were viable businesses. So, we created a six-month program to link them with mentors and other actors .” (ESO#22)

Promotion of entrepreneurs through multiple channels

“So definitely communication can be good and can be important and also beneficial for the entrepreneurs, right. So when you push out a story, it can help them to market themselves to give them credibility.” (ESO#2)

“They need to, they need their stories to be told. So, we started a media house that records their videos, tells their stories, but also brings them news of the opportunities that they can take advantage of.” (ESO#8)

“For example: there’s a big media company in the hub, and we asked them to offer services for other entrepreneurs (...) so we leverage the existing organisation already working in our spaces. We want to bring new opportunities for the whole network, you know.” (ESO#16)

“We encourage them to always do the networking, whether they’re doing it in an accelerator or hub, yeah, whether they’re doing it through social media. (...) And we push them with our network and on the social.” (ESO#17)

“When you start communicating your impact then many people get interested (...) sometimes people are reaching out to you because you’re effectively now communicating the result of what you’re doing.” (ESO#19)

Creation of communities of entrepreneurs

“Community is always about continuity as well, and relationships, especial” (ESO#2)

“We will train them together and we have WhatsApp groups. So, they keep in touch (...) We put them together, like I said with the events that we have, but also they are in group together on a daily base. So we form groups, yeah, where they’re all together. So, they can interact(...) and create synergies. And that happens all the time.” (ESO#5)

“These are young people, they’re students, they have studies, they work on the idea. So it’s kind of challenging. So one of the ways we’ve done that is to ensure that they work with teams. We don’t have any one person working alone.” (ESO#6)

“One of them suggested one of our alumni suggested cleaner to set up like an investment club. So let’s get to that. Yeah, to raise the funds, we manage the funds, and then they can invest into each other. Okay, so it was their idea. (...) And they’re like we want Einstein rising to manage it.” (ESO#8)

AGGREGATE	<i>1st order codes</i>
2nd order themes	Representative quotations

“We’ve also tried to back it up with technology such that then WhatsApp groups together are able to share ideas (...) so we’re trying our best to keep them to stay together.” (ESO#8)

“We’re running the Enterprise growth program, and in this program, we’re supposed to connect the businesses with businesses within the same industry to share challenges that they’re having within each other and to learn from each other.” (ESO#11)

“There was established companies, there were those that were just in the middle phase going and those that were in the ideation, you know. And the idea is just, we’re not going into programming and giving grants, but we use the ecosystem to kind of support each other.” (ESO#16)

“We build internal relationship with coffee corner conversations (...) And we have a community lunch every week on the same day. (...) is very intentional, and people share their learnings.” (ESO#16)

“When a new graphics company come in, the first thing I’m going to do is to introduce them to the existing graphic tenant. And the goal is for them to just see how they may work together or merger.” (ESO#16)

“In a network of entrepreneurs where they feed up against each other. Yeah, each of them helps the other in how to grow to business, how to manage, for example, human resource, how to package your product. They learn commercial strategies. So that support is important no matter what stage you’re at because it makes you connect.” (ESO#17)

“We find opportunities in many ways (...) Sometimes it is referrals, (...) than the refugees among themselves: they see opportunities that they know could benefit others. And then we WhatsApp group, where they keep sharing these opportunities for each other as well.” (ESO #19)

“ESO#22 has an alumni community; we are strong on relationships and community. So those, all those participants are mentioning a part of the alumni community.” (ESO#22)

“It’s a community that brings all these like-minded people together, they are able to share their experiences, even access talent, if you’re looking for a co-founder for your start-ups, chances are they are probably sitting somewhere in this space.” (ESO#24)
